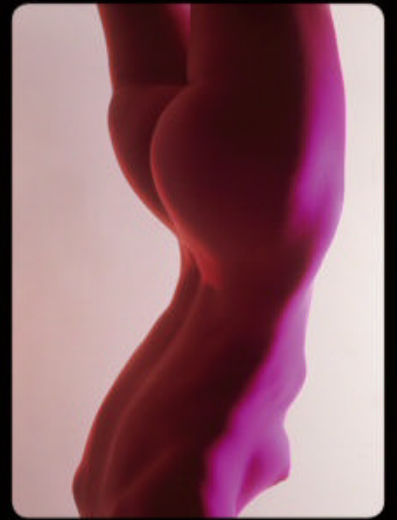
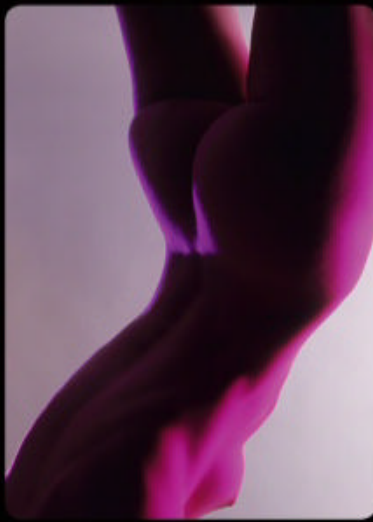
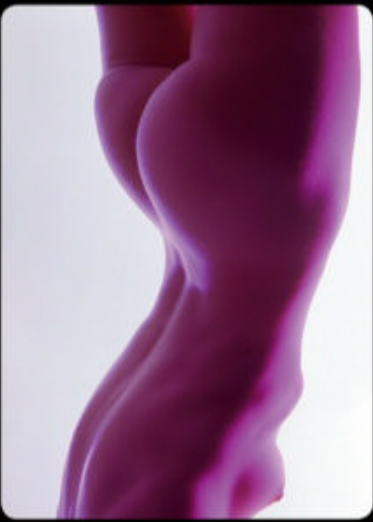
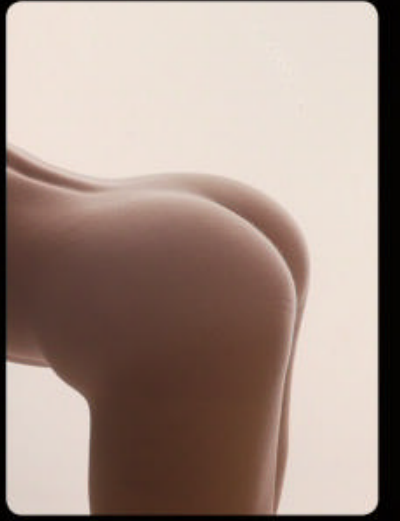
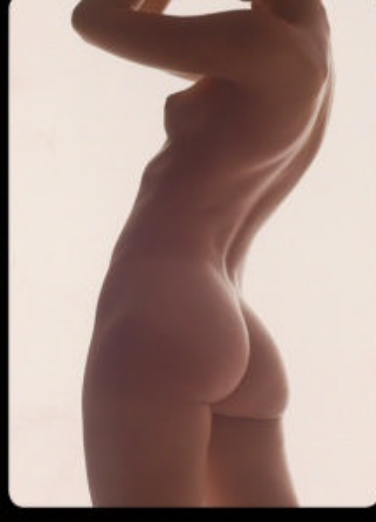


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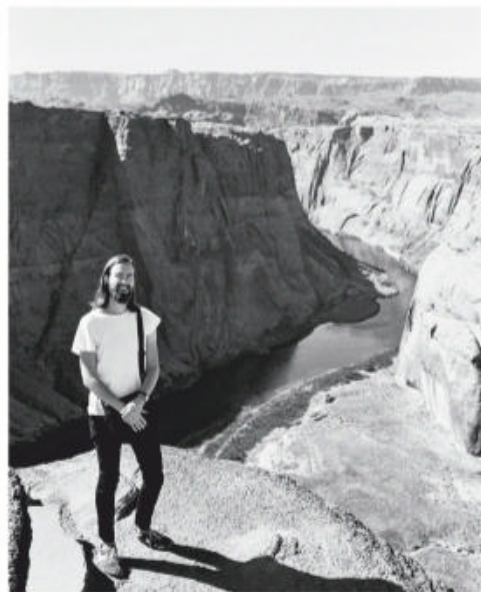
t: @AndreaDomanick

The journalist behind this issue's 20Q is the former West Coast editor of *Noisey* and has lent her byline to *Rolling Stone*, *Spin* and the *Los Angeles Times*. With an editorial sweet spot that lands, in her words, at "the intersection of music, culture and social justice," Domanick was an ideal writer to sit with stratospheric country star Maren Morris for a lively discussion on gender, genres and the one thing no man should ever forget to do in the bedroom.

GRAHAM DUNN

i: @grahamdunn

Citing nature and nostalgia as themes that inform his work, Dunn is known for his ability to capture strikingly intimate moments. We tapped the longtime *PLAYBOY* contributor to photograph Tyler Blackburn on the precipice of a new chapter in the actor's life. "Tyler did this cool switching between contemplative moments and direct glimpses of himself," says Dunn of the shoot for *Down to Earth*. "It made for a really personal portrait session."



DREAM HAMPTON

t: @dreamhampton

Shortly after signing on for the *Playboy Interview* with Tarana Burke, and following the premiere of her Lifetime docu-series *Surviving R. Kelly*, this powerhouse writer and producer was named one of 2019's Time 100. Burke herself wrote the accompanying tribute, describing Hampton as "the kind of storyteller who could change things." Indeed, even as *Surviving* reshapes the #MeToo conversation, Hampton continues to put out vital work, including the BET series *Finding Justice* and the HBO documentary *It's a Hard Truth, Ain't It*.



MATT MCGORRY

i: @mattmcgorry

For this edition of *The Playboy Symposium*, we asked the *Orange Is the New Black* breakout star to gather a diverse panel of forward thinkers willing to weigh in on the state of gender and power in America. Says the actor-activist of what's missing from the collective conversation: "A willingness of those in positions of privilege—men when we're talking about gender equality, or white people when we're talking about racial justice—to truly and deeply invest in understanding what is being asked of us as allies."

CARLOTA GUERRERO

i: @carlota_guerrero

This self-taught photographer's first major gig was a collaboration with Solange, shooting the cover and art directing print and video for the R&B star's 2016 album, *A Seat at the Table*. Since then, Guerrero has applied her ethereal blend of what she describes as "feminism, nature and performance" to collabs with everyone from Dior to poet Rupi Kaur. Her *PLAYBOY* debut, *Culture Shock*, depicts a defiant celebration on the streets of her native Barcelona.



ANITA LITTLE

t: @fenix_rising

"I love the juxtaposition of Tarana Burke and *PLAYBOY*," says Little of this issue's *Playboy Interview*. "It will be so unexpected to so many, and that's what makes her inclusion even more necessary." Speaking of unexpected juxtapositions, before becoming a *PLAYBOY* features editor, Little—whose editorial contributions to this issue also include *Let's Play*, *The Future of Sex Toys Is Gender Neutral* and the BDSM pictorial *Give Me More*—spent three years at *Ms.* magazine.

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IAN KARMEL

t: @IanKarmel

An Emmy-nominated comedian and head writer for *The Late Late Show With James Corden*, Karmel is also the first-ever guest editor of *Playboy's Party Jokes*. ("Extremely, extremely horny" was his emotional response to the offer.) "Since it's PLAYBOY, I thought it would be fun to have only women contribute," he says. "Everyone I asked was excited to do it, except my ex-girlfriend. Which...thank God. It would be hard not to read into those."



JANE HU

i: @plainjane

One rarely encounters an artist as comfortable shifting between the rational and creative realms as Hu—a renowned Burning Man photographer and a Stanford MBA. That capacity for complexity is why we asked her to spend a weekend snapping the outré arts community that's transforming a tiny town in the California desert (*Wasteland Wonderland*). "I'm obsessed with the potential of art to effect change; the Bombay Beach Biennale is literally the aesthetic manifestation of that."

MALY SIRI

i: @maly_siri_pinupart

Keen-eyed readers of recent issues may have noticed a stunning addition to our Centerfolds: The pencil-and-brushwork portraits that now accompany each Playmate pictorial are the creations of this French artist, who joins Alberto Vargas and Olivia De Berardinis in the pantheon of PLAYBOY pinup purveyors. "The pinup girl may have started as a heterosexual fantasy," Siri says, "but nowadays women have made it a weapon of empowerment."



ALEX THOMAS

t: @AlexThomasDC

For *The Long Road to President Pete*, we sent our Washington correspondent out on the campaign trail with South Bend, Indiana mayor Pete Buttigieg, the fresh-faced contender who could take down Trump—and, if elected, become the country's first openly gay president. "America is ready for somebody who doesn't fit the profile of a typical president," Thomas says. "Mayor Pete has been able to capitalize on that."



WILL VARNER

i: @willvarnerart

Varner's mash-up of KonMari and clitorises on page 125 marks a break from PLAYBOY's historically hetero humor. "I try to tell stories that reflect the complex, diverse, troubling but beautiful world we live in," says the former BuzzFeed design director. "I hope this one makes readers laugh and also increases the spaces where queer people can feel comfortable and see their stories represented." Varner is also an illustrator and an adjunct professor at the School of Visual Arts.

JOYCE CAROL OATES

t: @JoyceCarolOates

This legendary writer's PLAYBOY contributions span more than 48 years and 17 pieces of fiction—not to mention the *Playboy Interview*, which featured her in 1993. She returns to our pages with a timely short story that captures the anger of a generation: In *Mr. Stickum*, outraged teens hatch an ingenious scheme to take out their town's sexual predators. The exclusive tale arrives on the heels of Oates's new novel, *My Life as a Rat* (HarperCollins).



Amiee Byrne; pp. 24–29 models Courtland Anderson, Chara Burgh, Ileina Castel, Arlondriah Lenyéa, Marisa Papen, Linnea Snyderman, Aaron Joshua Valenzuela, makeup by Whitney Renner; pp. 31–32 styling by Jill Vincent, hair by Tara Copeland, grooming by Bree Stanchfield, makeup by Golden Shyne; pp. 39–47 styling by Whitney Mero, makeup by Camara Aunique, produced by Greg Chrisis; pp. 56–63 hair and makeup by Brittani Antoinette, Casey Gore and Iris Moreau; pp. 72–83, 87 model Teela LaRoux, styling by Kelley Ash, prop styling by Craig Sweet, hair and makeup by Bree Stanchfield; pp. 88–93, styling by Stephanie Thorpe, hair by Marwa Bashir, makeup by Lorrie Turk, produced by Jeff Molyneaux; pp. 100–107 styling by Annie & Hannah, grooming by Kathy Santiago, prop styling by Madison George and Jacob Zimmerman; pp. 126–137, 141 model Geena Rocero, styling by Wiissa, hair and makeup by Matisse Andrews; pp. 142–149 models Austin Bachlor, Kristy Garrett, Kirby Griffin, Miki Hamano, Raquel Pomplun, styling by Chloe & Chenelle, hair and makeup by Casey Gore, Maddie North; pp. 162–165 styling by Evan Simonitsch, grooming by Joanna Pensinger; pp. 172–183, 187 model Sophie O'Neil, styling by Kelley Ash, hair and makeup by Bree Stanchfield; pp. 196–205, main models Alex de la Croix, Dolores de la Rosal, Lovisa Lager, Virgin Maria, La Zowi, extras Bernarda Antonia, Ana Nicole Montes de Oca Colliander, Aminata Diao, Intissar El Mesquine, Cristina Ramirez Garrido, Cláudia Grosche, Olivia Huerta, Celina Bähr Martins, Nina Pham, Maya Ponzini, Eleni Reynera, Elisa Sanfeliu Ricart, Gabriela Richardson, Patricia Franquesa Ruiz, Dana Silva, Carolina Costa Trinchês, styling by Stephania Yepes, makeup by Gloria Rico, produced by O Creative Studio.

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PLAYBOY

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1953–2017

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 PLAYBOY
BY
PACSUN



LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

TO OUR READERS:

“Gay Is Good.”

In March 1969, PLAYBOY published a reader’s letter with this deceptively simple headline. But what the writer, Frank Kameny, shared was more than a letter to our editors. It was a diagnosis. He wrote that homosexuality is not a sickness; rather, it is society that is sick when it labels homosexuality a pathology. Society, he argued, had to be healed.

Publishing this argument was nothing short of radical. At that time, the American Psychiatric Association listed being gay as a mental disorder, and the Stonewall riots, which catalyzed the LGBTQ rights movement, were still months away.

Today, the rallying cry “Gay is good” reminds us how far we’ve come in the past 50 years. Yet despite this encouraging progress, the battle to overcome the forces of prejudice and discrimination still rages. This issue is dedicated to that fight. PLAYBOY is committed to providing a platform for those voices who broaden the definition of “normal,” who confront social conventions and who celebrate the power of diverse identities.

Which leads us to *Faces of Resilience*, an eight-page dedication to the warriors who have survived conversion therapy and those who are fighting, state by state, to ban the practice nationwide. With editorial guidance from the Trevor Project, an organization supporting at-risk LGBTQ youth, PLAYBOY is proud to spotlight these change-makers.

One’s right to dignity and equal treatment, regardless of gender or sexuality, is also explored in Tarana Burke’s rousing *Playboy Interview*. Speaking with *Surviving R. Kelly* executive producer dream hampton, the founder of Me Too reflects on what the movement has accomplished while acknowledging where it has been coopted, weaponized and dismissed. Burke has irrevocably changed the sexual landscape in America; her insights on where change is still needed will challenge and inspire you.

In *Our Country, Which Art in Panic*, gender politics professor and “unconventional feminist” Shira Tarrant surveys many of the same issues (Title IX, modern-day #MeToo, cancel

culture) through a legal lens. Her ideas about our divisive national debate over sexual assault sometimes run counter to Burke’s, but they’re rooted in the same passion for equality.

Despite these tensions, a new generation of artists and activists is evolving the concepts of gender and sexuality beyond their traditional boundaries. Actor Avan Jogia discusses with us why labels such as “man” and “straight” actually limit, rather than merely define, the human experience. Maren Morris, today’s most-played female singer on country radio, claps back at her genre’s inability to support sex-positive women, while activist Chidera Eggerue lays the groundwork for a new approach to feminism. And visual artists Helen Beard and Ed Freeman stun us with their fresh representations of the human form.

Taking pride in sexuality isn’t without risk. For *Culture Shock*, renowned photographer Carlota Guerrero and a cast of women braved Barcelona police so they could entice us to rethink female sexuality as artistic expression and public performance. In *The Playboy Symposium*, guest editor Matt McGorry introduces four voices who champion a culture of nontoxic masculinity while urging men to see the new gender norms as opportunities for growth and fulfillment. And in *The Long Road to President Pete*, PLAYBOY’s Washington correspondent, Alex Thomas, profiles the millennial presidential candidate who could make history as our first-ever publicly gay commander in chief.

Finally, our three magnetic Playmates—Teela LaRoux, Geena Rocero and Sophie O’Neil—proudly share their personal stories. As Rocero writes, “This is our lived experience. It’s not up for debate.”

Our contributors remind us that enjoying sexual freedom means defending the rights of all genders and identities. As we celebrate the richness of different lived experiences, we are energized by the opportunity to come out formally for what we believe. And so, inspired by Kameny’s 1969 letter to the editor, let this be a letter *from* the editors that proudly reminds the world where PLAYBOY stands: Gay is good.

PLAYBOY

BY

Coco de Mer

LONDON

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PRIDE IS GOOD

As a brand built on the conviction that all people—no matter their race, gender or sexual orientation—have an equal right to pleasure, Playboy is fiercely committed to fighting for LGBTQ rights both inside and outside the pages of this magazine. In honor of that commitment, Playboy asked seven artists from the LGBTQ community to reimagine our Bunny ears with artwork that reflects what pride means to them. Proceeds from the ears—which will be available at PlayboyShop.com in June, just in time for pride month—will support 50 Bills 50 States, the Trevor Project's initiative to ban conversion therapy in the U.S. Check out this behind-the-scenes look at our call to ears and the artists leading the charge. (Learn more about the Trevor Project, including inspiring stories from those leading the fight against conversion therapy, in our *Faces of Resilience* feature, page 56.)



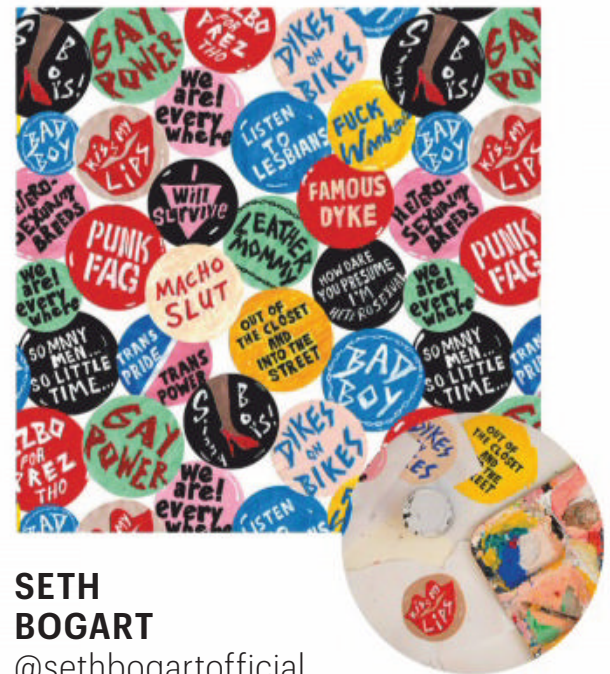
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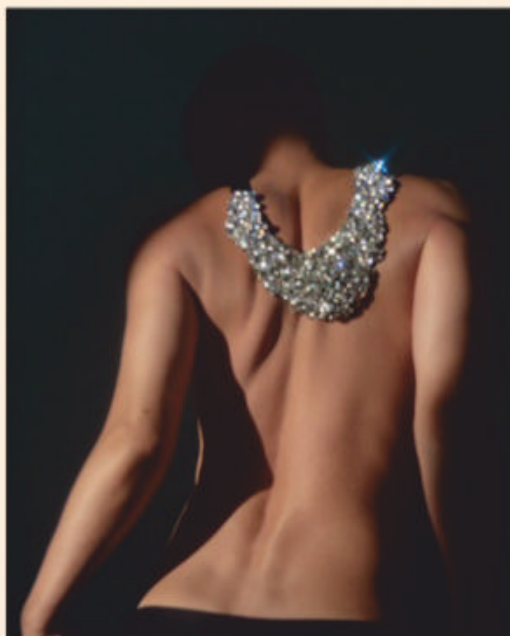


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SARAH MAXWELL
@sarahmaxwellart

FROM KOREA WITH LOVE



"In 2019, there is no single word to explain a person's sexuality. Many people are not just male, female, heterosexual, homosexual." So says our international sister publication *Playboy Korea* in its recent 20Q with actor Hong Seok-cheon. A superstar in South Korea, Hong is considered the country's first openly gay celebrity. "It's been really hard, but I knew I had to be honest with myself first if I wanted to love someone else," says Hong of how his world changed after he came out in 2000. "I don't regret my decision at all." Accompanying the actor's insights is a pictorial (outtakes above) that bears a flattering resemblance to the Ezra Miller feature that ran, Bunny ears and all, in our Winter 2019 issue. Together, the two stories stand as a celebration of fluidity that Hong and Miller embody from opposite corners of the globe.



ON OUR SHELVES

With a résumé that spans 53 years and 10 roles at Playboy, Pat Lacey (left) has lived and breathed this brand longer than just about anyone. Now, the former Club Bunny, Bunny Mother and Playmate Promotions coordinator shares her fascinating story in the pages of a new memoir. In *The Black Bunny Hop*, out now, Lacey traces her life's challenges and triumphs, including her experiences confronting racism as a Bunny at the Sunset Strip Playboy Club during the civil rights era. Lacey sums it all up in the book's preface: "My life has been happy, sad, funny, heartwarming, sexy and unbelievably satisfying."

CUCKOO FOR COCO



Ever since it entered British bedrooms in 2001, Coco de Mer has been credited with elevating the U.K.'s perception of lingerie. Based on this photo of July Playmate Teela LaRoux wearing the new Silver Moon bra and

brief, we predict the intimates empire's latest collaboration with Playboy will be no less impactful on domestic audiences. July's Playboy Collection by Coco de Mer is meant to capture the "sensuality, temptation and revelry of a glamorous night on the town." coco-de-mer.com/playboy-by-coco-de-mer

MEET ME IN VEGAS

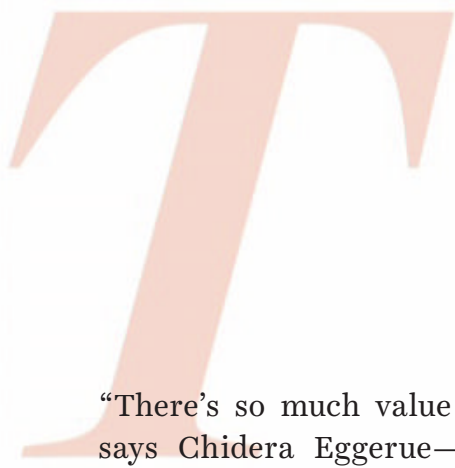


Everybunny in the pool! Playboy Fridays at TAO Beach—our annual residency at the Venetian in Las Vegas—are back for another steamy summer. Every Friday through Labor Day, Playboy will transform the hotel's 18,000-square-foot day club into a Rabbit-riddled oasis complete with Playmates, Bunny servers, themed cabanas and the hottest DJs on the Strip. What's more, the series will once again include Discover & Be Discovered, our talent search for future Playboy muses. (Speaking of muses, March Playmate Miki Hamano is pictured above, kicking off the season.) For tickets, VIP packages and cabana reservations (ages 21 and over), visit taolasvegas.com/beach/playboyfridays.



A body-positivity
blogger propelled
into fame, the
woman behind
The Slumflower
reflects on the
freedom—and
scrutiny—that
comes with
leading a feminist
movement

CHIDERA EGGERUE



“There’s so much value in being a troublemaker!” says Chidera Eggerue—though in relative terms, stirring things up is a fairly recent development for the 24-year-old. It started with her fashion blog, *The Slumflower*, a hub for stylish black women who don’t relate to the trend of “mostly white women with the same balayage hairstyle, fedora hat and camel coat.” This led to her creation of the SaggyBoobsMatter hashtag in the fall of 2017, which launched her into the body-positivity movement. The irony is that Eggerue, long made to feel self-conscious about her appearance, once saved money for a breast augmentation. Then she had an epiphany: Celebrating her body and defying the culture’s obsession with perky breasts might flip the conversation for women—at the very least, for some women of color.

Calling her work within this 21st century movement a success would be an understatement. Touted as a leading feminist voice of her generation, Eggerue has appeared on national talk shows in the United Kingdom to discuss her social savvy (more than 12,000 Instagram posts bear the SaggyBoobsMatter hashtag); published a best-selling book, 2018’s *What a Time to Be Alone*; hosted her first #BlockHimParty (in which she encourages women to leave toxic relationships); and fronted an Adidas campaign that was plastered across London’s Underground.

Eggerue assures me she didn’t come out of the womb like this. Raised by Nigerian parents in Peckham—home to the largest community of Nigerians in the U.K.—she was an inquisitive child who wanted to be “liked and accepted.” She tried to “blend into the background” until the BRIT School put her on a new path. The performing arts institution that has produced such singular talents as Adele, Amy Winehouse and Imogen Heap encouraged individualism, leading Eggerue to develop a mantra: “I can be different, I can stand out, I can be loud, I can be annoying, and I’m not gonna be punished for this,” she tells me.

She brings the same moxie to our discussions about how racism robs black girls of their innocence and why she’s happy Serena Williams finally found the love she deserves. Each point is delivered with blazing conviction. Manicured nails waving, she’s animated

BY GRACE SHUTTI

enough to remind you she’s a young black woman from south London (one energized “Okkkkk” here, a “Girl, sometimes it be like that” there) but slick enough to repeat my questions in her answers—a tell indicating someone who has done a lot of interviews.

Her radical outspokenness, mixed with just the right amount of self-awareness, is one reason 220,000 people follow her on Instagram. She throws punches at the patriarchy in her captions, making them accessible to people who may not have read Audre Lorde. She also posts selfies in her underwear, though she jokingly tells me “the tiddies are still exclusive” after deciding to wear lingerie for her PLAYBOY shoot. More seriously, she remains conscious of her extended family. “What will my relatives in Nigeria think if they see my naked breast?” she says, breaking into a Nigerian accent. “I’m not ready to start doing that yet.”

Proverbs in Igbo, Eggerue’s first language, are the backbone of *What a Time to Be Alone*. The first adage in the book warns against comparing yourself to others: “He who is asking for the same haircut as John, does he have the same shaped head as John?”

Eggerue credits such wisdom with saving her life. And while many fans would say she’s taught them self-love, just as many cite her “tough truths.” Dating advice is also her purview, and lesson one is on maximizing your standards through strategic courtship. Eggerue tells women to be “as specific as you want to be,” regardless of whether it limits a potential suitor’s height, skin tone or occupation. “If there are women in the world who love dating tall men,” she says, “why can’t there be others who say, ‘I love dating rich men’?”

Some have pushed back at Eggerue for encouraging women to engage in transactional relationships. If you consider how stereotypes like that of the gold digger commonly stigmatize black women, it’s easy to understand the flak. “They have this idea that the exchange reflects your value as a human being,” she says of the critics. “I don’t believe that’s the case. It just means you chose to negotiate that. And that’s fine. Black women, out of everyone, deserve to struggle the least. We deserve a love that allows us to feel free. Love hits differently when you don’t have to worry about paying the rent.”



When I suggest the average woman may not have the same leverage as an author-speaker-influencer, Eggerue concedes the point. “That’s absolutely true,” she says, “but I still believe you can negotiate relatively, even if your negotiation is ‘I want a free meal.’” She adds a disclaimer: “My personal negotiation does not have to reflect femininity as a whole or feminism as a movement.”

Even with all the advice she dispenses, surely dating as the Slumflower can’t be easy. “It does interfere heavily,” she admits. “It means I can’t really date across anymore.” She instead dates high-earning men who don’t “feel compelled to want to compete with me, because they have so much going for themselves.” When I ask if she has found men who meet those standards, her answer is unequivocal: “Absolutely, absolutely.”

She says the approach has also changed her sex life. “I used to believe that my value came from being attractive enough for men to want to have sex with me.” Once she became more confident, the landscape changed. “I don’t engage in casual sex, because sex is such an important and powerful tool I can use to get what I want.”

I give her a quizzical look.

“I’m dead serious,” she says. “If a man can fix his mouth to ask me for sex, I can fix my mouth to ask him what I want to ask him for. That’s not to say women who choose to engage in casual sex aren’t lining up the best of their potential. It’s saying there’s power in this, and you can harness it if you want to.”

Redefining the power dynamic between the sexes doesn’t come without a learning curve, however. A few weeks before our interview, Eggerue came under fire for since-deleted tweets that some claim made light of male suicide rates. She posted an essay to clarify her views, stating that though the harm men suffer as a consequence of toxic masculinity is a valid concern, “men often bring up their victimhood to patriarchy as a means to silence women.”

Her comments triggered a debate about her brand of feminism. When I ask if she understands the backlash, Eggerue restates her mission to “highlight female oppression.” She adds

that men have the ability to organize: “If women were able to congregate and create things like feminism, I believe men have even more power to do something for themselves where they can build, create and support initiatives to help themselves.”

Still, many of her critics are put off by the idea that modern feminism means being comfortable with—or even celebrating—men experiencing harm. Some wonder how that benefits feminism, or indeed humanity. Prominent black women have expressed their disagreement with Eggerue but have also called out the impropriety of those who’ve leveled criticism against a black woman who is only 24. Author Reni Eddo-Lodge, for example, remarked that *The Guardian*’s Zoe Williams, who wrote an op-ed piece titled “Feminism Without Human Warmth Leaves Me Cold,” didn’t show “the same energy for her white feminist peers who’ve been challenged on their intersectional failures.”

“These publications exist in a place of comfort where they can afford to chuck a black woman in the firing line and watch people scrap for the bones,” Eggerue says. “Then you have super right-wing white men in your notifications telling you you deserve to die. It’s like, how did we get here?”

Spending time offline is a no-brainer, and it’s telling that Eggerue is building a career beyond the clutches of the internet. Her excitement is palpable when she discusses working with women in Nigeria. She wants to learn from older women who have done similar work but is wary of forcing her British experience on people. “The social landscape is different. I don’t wanna just go there and be like, ‘Hey, everyone, I’m here now.’ I want a calculated approach. But,” she adds, “I also can’t afford to wait for people to like what I’m doing in order for my future to materialize.”

You may not agree with her, but it’s naive to discount the impact Eggerue has had on other women—the ones she has inspired but also the ones who disagree with her. And that is a reality she’s more than fine with: “I will have to live with all of my decisions. Nobody else.” ■

THE IDENTITY

It has been 71 years since Alfred Kinsey broke ground in the study of human sexuality by introducing the Kinsey scale, which served as the first prominent claim that sexual orientation is nonbinary. Suggesting one's orientation can fall anywhere between exclusively heterosexual and exclusively homosexual, Kinsey's theory remains relevant as similar assertions on gender fluidity and expression emerge, changing how we think about sexual identity. Below, we define a few identity markers and plot some key public figures based on sex, gender expression and sexual orientation to demonstrate the possibilities, whether you're cisgender, transgender, nonbinary or non-identifying. Enjoy, and remember: Only you can determine your sexual identity.

IF YOU IDENTIFY AS A WOMAN

IF YOU PRESENT AS MORE FEMININE

Heterosexual: Attracted to the opposite sex; synonymous with *straight*. Reference: Taylor Swift, whose reputation is based on hetero love affairs.



Femme: A lesbian whose appearance and behavior are seen as traditionally feminine. Reference: Portia de Rossi.

Heteroflexible: Attracted primarily to the opposite sex but open to same-sex relationships. Reference: Frida Kahlo, who was married to Diego Rivera for more than 20 years but reportedly had romantic relations with Georgia O'Keeffe, among other women.



0 STRAIGHT 1 HOMO-CURIOUS 2 HETERO-FLEXIBLE 3 BISEXUAL 4 HOMO-FLEXIBLE 5 HETERO-CURIOUS 6 GAY

Androgynous: Exhibiting both masculine and feminine qualities (the term describes gender presentation, not sexual orientation). Reference: Grace Jones.



IF YOU PRESENT AS MORE MASCULINE



Heterocurious: Attracted primarily to the same sex but showing interest in the opposite sex. Reference: Ellen DeGeneres, who has playfully remarked that she's attracted to Ryan Reynolds and Ryan Gosling.

OFF THE CHARTS

Queer
Nonheterosexual and/or nonbinary; an all-encompassing term for the LGBTQ+ community. Reference: Kehlani.



Pansexual
Attracted to people of all genders or sexes, or regardless of gender or sex. Reference: Alyson Stoner, who came out in March 2018, saying, "I...am attracted to men, women and people who identify in other ways. I can love people of every gender identity and expression. It is the soul that captivates me."

Asexual
Not attracted to any sex. Reference: Tim Gunn, who in 2012 revealed he had been celibate for 29 years.

Intersex
An umbrella term for people who have one or more of a range of variations in sex characteristics. Reference: International runway model Hanne Gaby Odiele.

Nonbinary
Any gender identity outside the male-female binary. Reference: Sam Smith, who in March announced, "I've always existed between the two genders."

Transitioning
The emotional, surgical, hormonal and/or legal process of changing one's gender presentation. Reference: Professional weight lifter Janae Marie Kroczaleski, who chronicles their transition in the documentary *Transformer*.

Agender
Having no affiliation with any societally defined gender. Reference: Rapper Angel Haze.

IF YOU IDENTIFY AS A MAN

IF YOU PRESENT AS MORE MASCULINE

Androphilia: An attraction to masculinity (gynephilia describes an attraction to femininity). Both men and women can be androphiles. Reference: Anyone strongly attracted to masculine men such as Jason Momoa qualifies as an androphile.



Homoflexible: Attracted primarily to the same sex but open to opposite-sex relations. Reference: Alexander the Great, who was famous for his trysts with women but supposedly had romantic attachments to his childhood companion Hephaestion and the eunuch Bagoas.



Questioning: Curious or uncertain about one's sexual identity. Reference: Lucas Hedges, who told Ellen DeGeneres last year that he believes human sexuality is fluid.

0 STRAIGHT 1 HOMO-CURIOUS 2 HETERO-FLEXIBLE 3 BISEXUAL 4 HOMO-FLEXIBLE 5 HETERO-CURIOUS 6 GAY

Metropolitan: Straight men who have interests such as grooming and fashion that society defines as "feminine." Reference: The always well-coiffed Prince.



Bisexual: Attracted to both sexes. Reference: David Bowie, who in his 1976 *Playboy* Interview celebrated his bisexuality, saying, "I suppose it's the best thing that ever happened to me."



Drag Queen: A man—commonly gay—who dresses as a woman for the sake of performance and entertainment. Reference: RuPaul.



IF YOU PRESENT AS MORE FEMININE

MATRIX

ILLUSTRATION BY BODIL JANE, FOLIO ART

BY SUZANNAH
WEISS

the future of sex toys is gender neutral

BUTT PLUGS ARE NO LONGER ONLY FOR GAY MEN, AND VIBRATORS AREN'T JUST FOR WOMEN

As a kid, I was expected to play with “girls’ toys” like dolls and horses, but I also enjoyed “boys’ toys” like race cars and action figures. As an adult, when sex toys became my playthings of choice, I found there wasn’t much wiggle room: The ones designed for my body were pink or purple, often with photos of women in sexy underwear on the package.

In recent years major retailers have begun to offer gender-neutral products or to market existing ones as gender neutral. Target has removed gender-based signs from its kids’ sections, Amazon no longer uses gender filters in its toy listings, and the Disney Store has stopped labeling children’s costumes as either “boys” or “girls.” But one product category has remained stubbornly gendered: sex toys. Many adult companies are surprisingly regressive in assuming that certain toys are made for certain bodies and certain bodies map onto certain identities. Slowly, though, that’s also changing—and, in the process, changing how we think about sex, gender and pleasure.

Carol Queen, resident sexologist for the feminist sex shop Good Vibrations, says her customers have long been vocal about their desire for less-gendered toys. Some of those customers are among the increasingly visible population of trans and nonbinary people. A recent study from the Williams Institute at UCLA found that the estimated percentage of adults in the United States who identify as transgender has doubled in roughly the past decade. These people may feel excluded by toys that come in pink pouches emblazoned with photos of women just because they’re designed for vulvas.

“Labeling toys by gender puts the power in the sellers’ hands to make assumptions about buyers based on their gender,” says Ambrose Heffner, a trans man. “Labeling toys by function puts the power in buyers’ hands to make a judgment call and make their own empowered decisions regarding their body and sexuality.”

Restrictive labeling affects cisgender customers as well. “Our



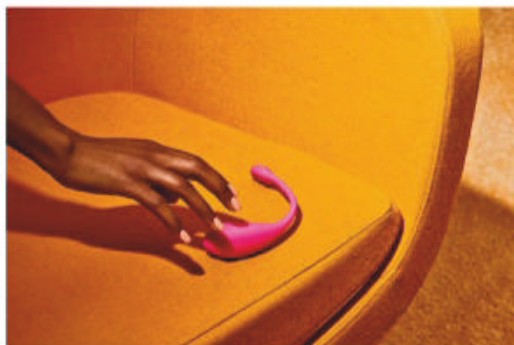




Above: A vibrator for females and a masturbation aid for males, this sex toy is ideal for couples' play but can also be used solo. Rianne S Duo Vibe, \$90.

Left: This small but mighty spherical toy packs a powerful punch, and all that's required for enjoyment is nerve endings. Unbound Babes Bean, \$36.

Right: Designed for long-distance couples, the Lush 2 allows users to control the vibration intensity via cell phone. Lovense Lush 2, \$119.



cis-women customers have long disliked the 'porno lady' boxes because they were being sold an image of what a woman should look like along with their vibrator," Queen explains. Gender-neutral toys appeal to people who want to experiment with new sensations but feel intimidated by—or are simply unaware of—products marketed to a different demographic. "There are many men out there who could benefit from using toys marketed to women but haven't because the toys are bright pink or designed to look like a realistic penis," says Daniel Saynt, founder of the sexual-wellness digital agency NSFW Creative.

To meet these customers' demands, brands are tailoring their colors, designs and packaging to a broader range of buyers. Over the past few years, Lovense has released at least two toys, the wand vibrator Domi and the vibrating butt plug Hush, exclusively in black—a stark contrast to its couples' set from 2013: a pink vibrator named Nora and a white masturbation sleeve named Max. Anal-toy seller b-Vibe offers most of its products in black, and sexual-wellness brand Maude offers a plain gray personal massager simply called "vibe." Dame Products, which launched the couples' vibrator Eva to close the pleasure gap between men and women, now markets its products as sex aids for all people with vulvas.

Some companies have even designed new products to work on a variety of bodies. MysteryVibe's Crescendo vibrator folds and twists into different shapes so users can stimulate multiple body parts. Customers appreciate the Crescendo—which, according to MysteryVibe, doubled the company's sales between

2016 and 2018—because they can use it not just on themselves but also on their partners, regardless of how they identify. "The fact that you can have one multipurpose, fully adaptable product helps shift your focus off the need for the 'correct' toy for a specific region and allows the user to be more creative in the application of it—and thus more creative and engaged in sex in general," says chief marketing officer Dominnique Karetsos.

Lelo's Transformer, which morphs into a rabbit vibrator, cock ring, prostate massager and more, raked in more than \$1 million in its first year, according to the company's brand expert, Stu Nugent. Users like that it isn't in your face about being gender neutral, he explains. "Most nonbinary customers don't want to be reminded of gender all the time."

It's not just sex-toy inventors hopping on the gender-neutral bandwagon; some online marketplaces, including Wild Flower, Spectrum Boutique and Vibrant, avoid grouping products by gender or mentioning gender in their descriptions. "Wild Flower has grown by five times its size over the last year alone, and based on customer feedback, a lot of that growth is in part because of how accessible toys become once gender is removed," says Amy Boyajian, Wild Flower co-founder and chief executive officer. "Customers are getting the products they desire easily while also being introduced to new options." (Boyajian also notes that gender-neutral sex toys push back against the "pink tax"—the higher prices typically placed on female-gendered products.)

Many retailers similarly avoid labels such as "sex toys for women" and "sex toys for men" in their signage and conversations with customers, says Lynn Comella, author of *Vibrator Nation: How Feminist Sex-Toy Stores Changed the Business of Pleasure*. "Some of the most interesting conversations I had with sex-toy retailers and buyers were about 'queering' sex toys and breaking open boxes that didn't need to be there," she says.

Although the "gender neutral" label often attracts a wider customer base, many—one could argue all—toys originally made for one gender are already gender neutral. Lelo, for example, says it initially marketed its Mona as a G-spot massager but saw an uptick in sales after promoting it as a prostate massager. "While it's possible to make a versatile sex toy and phrase everything

Below: This weighted anal toy provides the sensation of penetration, while the slick silicone exterior makes for comfortable entry. B-Vibe Snug Plug 3, \$55.



Above: For the adventurous, this double-ended vibrator can easily morph into a cock ring, a rabbit vibe, a clitoral massager and just about anything else, with a few simple twists. It can be as flexible and versatile as the sexual identity of its users. Lelo Transformer, \$129.

vaguely to avoid making assumptions or dictating how a product should be used, you also occasionally have to say very directly, ‘Hey, try putting this thing directly up your butt,’” says Nugent.

While such marketing may seem progressive, sex toys are actually returning to their roots. As far back as the late 1800s, vibrator ads featured both men and women, according to Hallie Lieberman, author of *Buzz: A Stimulating History of the Sex Toy*. “It wasn’t until the 1960s and 1970s, with some in the feminist movement like Betty Dodson turning vibrators into symbols of female empowerment, that they got gendered more female,” she says.

The evolution goes on. The first gender-neutral toys had generic bases with male and female attachments, but as more people identify outside the gender binary, brands are accommodating a broader range of identities. “You can sell a gender-neutral toy to a much larger market than you can a gendered toy, so there’s more opportunity to make money,” Lieberman says.

Perhaps one day it will become common knowledge that sex aids of all varieties, just like clothes or children’s toys, can be enjoyed by anyone, regardless of their anatomy or identity. Personally, the chance to use gender-neutral sex toys has helped me feel freer to forge my own identity, just as the ability to play with dinosaurs did when I was a kid. ■

his & hers

A healthy sex life isn't reserved for any one gender—so why is it harder for women to have one? We size up the past, present and future of sexual health

In 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt signed the Pure Food and Drug Act into law, leading to the creation of the FDA. The goal was to better protect public health, but the agency would go on to disregard half the U.S. population in clinical studies for the next 87 years, until finally changing its guidelines in 1993 to encourage researchers to include both sexes. The result? Decades of medical advancements based on male bodies.

Can't get it up? We have pills for that. Coming too soon? Not at all? The best scientists have been addressing men's bedroom woes for decades. Meanwhile, women's sexual health has received a fraction of the attention, perhaps because policy makers don't understand the terminology: Mention women's sexual health and you'll likely hear more about abortion than orgasms.

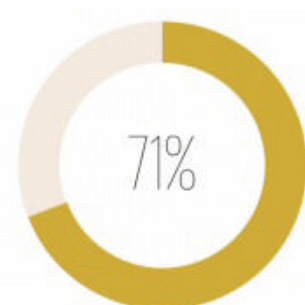
In reality, women's sexual health includes everything from low sexual desire to the inability to climax. But few of these issues have attracted scientific innovation and advertising dollars on the scale of erectile dysfunction. This gap will widen next April, when generic ED pills are expected to flood the market after Pfizer's 2002 patent for Viagra expires.

Female reproductive health is also suffering. In February, the Trump administration issued its Title X "gag rule," which bars clinics that provide abortion services from receiving federal funds. A federal judge blocked the new regulation in April, but its future remains uncertain, and clinics that treat STDs and provide family-planning services, such as Planned Parenthood, could still face closure. The fate of the Affordable Care Act (and with it, access to affordable birth control) remains in jeopardy as long as Republicans control the White House and the Senate.

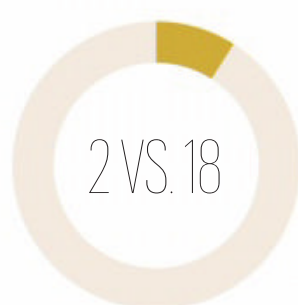
There is some good news: The cultural boom in self-care and the business boom in Big Pharma-free health could help level the field for women's sexual wellness. Better news: The booms are piquing the interest of men, who increasingly want to have more control in managing their health. For example, according to a March 2019 online poll conducted by Playboy, when it comes to male birth control, a majority of male respondents reported being interested in using methods other than condoms.

As the government continues to play a role in regulating—ahem, *protecting*—our bodies, we wanted to chart the current gaps in sexual health and take a look ahead. Consider it a remedial course in sexual education.

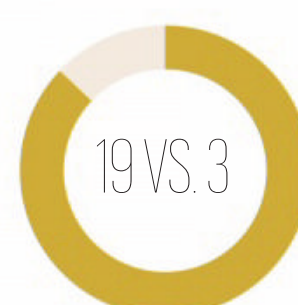
NUMBERS CAN'T FAKE IT



According to a recent Playboy poll, almost three quarters of male respondents are open to using male birth control pills.

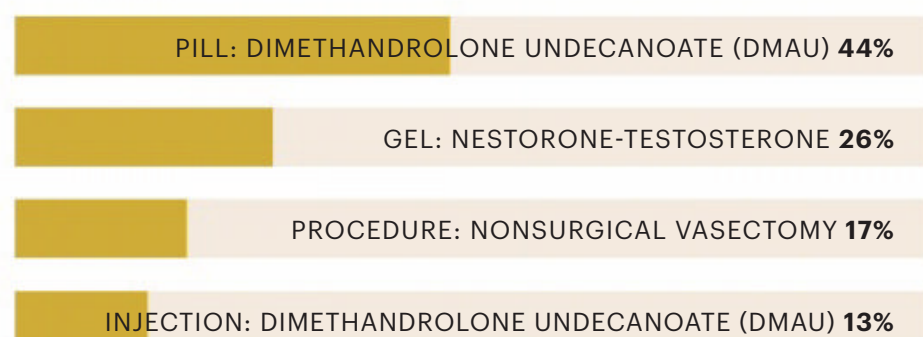


Even so, men have only one ninth as many FDA-approved contraceptive options as women do.



Meanwhile, men have at least 19 FDA-approved choices to treat sexual dysfunction; women have a whopping total of three.

Could male birth control disrupt the condom market? We polled our male social media followers on which options they'd be most willing to try.



FORECASTING THE FUTURE OF SEX

2019

On top of unveiling the Title X "domestic gag rule" in February, the Trump administration proposed earmarking \$75 million for the 2020 fiscal year to support abstinence-only sex-ed programs.

2020

Democrats vying for the White House are expected to campaign on repealing the 43-year-old Hyde Amendment, which forbids the federal government from funding abortion services except in very narrow circumstances.

2023

The global market for erectile-dysfunction treatments is projected to reach \$4.25 billion by 2023, in part due to reduced stigma and wider use of telemedicine.

"SEXUAL HEALTH IS AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF OVERALL HEALTH. AND WOMEN'S SEXUALITY, IN PARTICULAR, HAS BEEN WOEFULLY UNDERSTUDIED."

—MAYA DUSENBERY, author of *Doing Harm: The Truth About How Bad Medicine and Lazy Science Leave Women Dismissed, Misdiagnosed and Sick*

Median amount allocated from the National Institutes of Health to first-time researchers, by gender:

MEN \$166K WOMEN \$127K

Gender of practicing physicians, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation:

64% MEN **36% WOMEN**

SLANTS & STANCES

“DESPITE THE CONSIDERABLE PREVALENCE OF DISTRESSING LOW DESIRE IN YOUNG WOMEN AND ITS IMPACT ON THEIR LIVES, THIS CONDITION REMAINS UNDER-RECOGNIZED, UNDERDIAGNOSED AND UNDERTREATED”

—JAMES A. SIMON, president of the International Society for the Study of Women’s Sexual Health

“SEXUAL HEALTH IS TARGETED THROUGH GENDERED BODIES. I CAN’T THINK OF A SPACE THAT HELPS WOMEN WITH PELVIC PAIN OFF THE TOP OF MY HEAD THAT’S THE MISOGYNY OF THE MEDICAL FIELD”

—BIANCA LAUREANO, co-founder of the Women of Color Sexual Health Network

2025

Research and consulting firm Frost & Sullivan predicts that the women’s health and technology trade (dubbed “femtech”) could balloon to a \$50 billion industry by 2025.

2026

The global sexual-wellness market is projected to grow to \$123 billion by 2026, partly due to NGOs’ continued promotion of contraceptive use to prevent HIV and other STDs around the world.

IN EQUAL MEASURE?

	Female Birth Control	Male Sexual Dysfunction
THE COST	Planned Parenthood prices a tubal ligation, the female version of a vasectomy, as high as \$6,000. Women receive them three times more often than men undergo the less invasive male procedure.	The price of Viagra varies by insurance plan and pharmacy, but Costco lists 100-milligram pills of sildenafil, the only generic form of Viagra allowed on the market, at \$3.53 a pop.
THE MARKET	In 1960, Enovid became the first FDA-approved oral contraceptive for women. Fifty-nine years later, there is no male equivalent.	Viagra went on sale in 1998. It would be nearly 20 years until Addyi, the first drug for women’s sexual dysfunction, hit the market.
THE LAW	Late last year, the Trump administration attempted to circumvent the ACA by letting private employers deny birth-control coverage based on religious beliefs or “moral convictions.”	The ACA deems prescription coverage an “essential health benefit,” which means Viagra and sildenafil can be legally covered by private insurance providers.
THE REACTION	After Trump’s election in 2016, Harvard Medical School researchers reported a rise in the number of privately insured women seeking long-term birth control, such as IUDs and implants.	When a bill banning abortion after about six weeks passed in Georgia, State Representative Dar’shun Kendrick drafted a “testicular Bill of Rights” that would require men to get their sex partners’ approval before filling a Viagra prescription.

KEEP IT UP

As self-affirmation memes and ads for designer vibrators, cannabis lubes and sexperts take over social media (have you visited the Explore tab of your Instagram lately?), internet companies are innovating where government has stagnated. They’re also advocating a holistic approach to sexual health—aligning the mind and body to achieve a better libido—which has resulted in a market predicted to grow by billions in the next decade. Here are three companies making big waves in the new business of pleasure, plus a preview of Playboy’s foray into the market, set to hit stores this summer

Hims/Hers

These smartly art-directed subscription services are redefining self-care for men and women. Offering hair growth and anti-aging regimens for both sexes, Hims-branded sildenafil for men, and prescriptions for birth control (in rainbow packaging), Addyi and propranolol—a non-FDA-approved option for performance anxiety—for women, the company uses telemedicine to connect consumers to physicians and monthly plans.

Roman

Co-founded in 2017 by erectile-dysfunction sufferer Zachariah Reitano, Roman offers personalized treatments for sexual dysfunction, hair loss, genital herpes and even nicotine addiction. Each program is uploaded to an app that monitors users’ progress. The Morning Glory app, for example, tracks the frequency of morning erections—a method Roman claims can be helpful in determining a patient’s needs.

Goop

Gwyneth Paltrow’s lifestyle brand has been doling out expertise on beauty, fashion, food and travel since 2008, but more recently the company, reportedly worth \$250 million, has become famous for its quirky sex-based product reviews. With the option to buy straight from the website, readers can shop an array of sex toys, from the Vesper Vibrator necklace (\$149) to the Sado-Chic Chain set (\$1,500), alongside yoga pants and rice cookers.

Playboy Wellness

The Rabbit knows about rising to the occasion, which is why we’ve partnered with a leading producer to create two daily supplements for men to increase libido, decrease sexual anxiety and promote skin, hair and nail health. Hitting Vitamin Shoppe in July are our Legendary Sexual Wellness Support and our Testosterone Booster; both use nutraceutical formulas of amino acids, vitamins and antioxidants to jump-start the body.

Man in His Domain
ED FREEMAN

"I just hold my breath," says the photographer, shot here by Carlos Gonzalez Palmieri. As he did with the photos on these pages, Freeman digitally manipulates his work in post-production to achieve "eerie, uncanny" effects.

HIS HYPER-OBSERVANT ATTENTION TO LIGHT, MOVEMENT AND FORM ENCAPSULATES OUR CURRENT CURIOSITY ABOUT EVERYTHING FLUID. COME DIVE INTO THE WET, WONDROUS WORLD OF THIS ISSUE'S COVER ARTIST

BY MICHAEL SLENSKE

The photographer paces nervously around the shallow end of a 10-foot-deep capsule-shape pool. “I can’t swim,” he admits with a raspy laugh that carries across the backyard of a nondescript (if tastefully remodeled) midcentury ranch house in the Los Angeles suburb of Pasadena. The revelation is shocking given that he’s here to shoot a series of underwater nudes, one of which can be seen on the cover of this magazine. Right away, not all is as it seems. But this is the beauty of the life and work of Ed Freeman.

With his Caesar cut and silvery, speckled beard, it’s hard to believe the Worcester, Massachusetts-born artist is 76 years old. His athleisure ensemble of Nikes, track pants and aviators contrasts with that of his longtime aide-de-camp, Carlos Gonzalez Palmieri, who strolls around the yard like an off-duty Rat Packer in a flowery button-down, a trilby and Wayfarers.

“Even though I’m still the boss, I sort of work for him,” Freeman says jokingly of Palmieri. “All I do is make art.”

Palmieri has indeed played a crucial role in turning Freeman’s underwater practice “into a science,” which today starts with positioning C-stands around the pool to capture every beam of California light. “This is our big secret,” jokes Palmieri, barefoot, as he wraps the grip stands in foam padding. An assistant moves on to sinking polyester sheets into the pool for test shots while Freeman surveys the sparkling water with trepidation.

“We’ve tried 50 different ways of diffusing light, including a giant flag,” Freeman says. “It’s a square frame with a diffuser in it, but you really don’t want a heavy 12-foot device hanging over models.”

The pool area’s blue accent tiles also provide a tricky reflection, but Freeman knows to cover them with dresser-drawer liners. “It’s all very low-tech,” he says.

His equipment, not so much. Freeman shoots with a Nikon D850 (about \$3,000) nestled inside an AquaTech water housing (another \$1,600). With this apparatus and a 20-pound vest to offset his body’s natural buoyancy, he submerges to snap as many as 18 models in underwater balletic poses. This explains the need for a shallow backyard pool versus an Olympic-size one. “Sometimes I can’t get up,” he says, “and I’ve had to have my models rescue me.” Most of the time, it’s Palmieri who yanks him to the surface.

Freeman moved his operation to this suburban locale in the summer of 2009. A longtime friend, a former California Institute of Technology professor who resigned because it wasn’t

intellectually stimulating enough, gave Freeman carte blanche to use the *petite piscine*. Although he lives 20 minutes away, in Chinatown, the Pasadena ranch has effectively served as his studio ever since.

“I’m just really used to this,” he says. “I have this real sense that some power beyond my grasp is running these things. I never intended for any of this to happen.”

• • •

Freeman has spent roughly the past 12 years adding lyrical gravitas to the mythos of the southern California pool, which itself has been a recurring trope in postmodern art since David Hockney and Slim Aarons pushed it into the zeitgeist in the latter half of the 20th century. But producing otherworldly art in a modest backyard, featuring dancers—mostly female—whose poses could have been plucked from a Tintoretto or Rubens masterpiece, is the last thing anyone would have expected from the younger son of two Massachusetts Institute of Technology professors. His father taught statistical analysis and probability theory; his mother taught Russian and designed MIT’s first language lab.

“Everyone in the family went to either Harvard or MIT, except me,” says Freeman, noting that his older brother is now one of the world’s preeminent rare book dealers and scholars. “I was the black sheep.”

After living up to some expectations—Freeman played multiple instruments as a child and snapped photos for the local newspaper while studying at Ohio’s Oberlin College—he abruptly stuffed what he could into a backpack and hitchhiked to Mexico the day John F. Kennedy was assassinated. It served as a finale of sorts in a series of micro-dramas. He didn’t want to follow in his parents’ academic footsteps. He was also gay and painfully in love with his best friend. “College just made no sense” after Kennedy’s death, he says. “I walked out of class, and that was the last one I was ever in.”

What came next was a “Jack Kerouac kind of trip—all this crazy shit happened.” At the tail end of this drug-and-booze-fueled odyssey, a friend sent Freeman back to Massachusetts to sober up and reestablish himself. He began teaching folk guitar and eventually became a roadie for the Remains, who opened for the Beatles on their last U.S. tour. This in turn led to a stint as folksinger Phil Ochs’s road manager. “I got the job because people thought, Oh, he knows what he’s doing. I didn’t,” Freeman says.

He then began writing song lyrics. On the basis of one tune, his



Above: Artist and subjects at Freeman's *PLAYBOY* cover shoot in April 2019. "I'm doing stuff that's increasingly abstract," he says. **Left:** Freeman shoots Palmieri; Palmieri shoots back.

new band, the Joyful Noise, signed with Capitol Records and was flown to Los Angeles to live in a house (with naked groupies waiting poolside) at the top of Laurel Canyon, the enclave that was once home to Jim Morrison.

"We recorded two songs and broke up," recalls Freeman. "I was broke, and the producer mentioned he needed an arranger. I barely knew how to read and write music, but he handed me a tape and said, 'I need a string quartet and two Bach trumpets tomorrow.'" He proceeded to teach himself how to arrange that night, and he recorded the next day.

Following the Summer of Love, Freeman moved to New York and arranged hits for Carly Simon and Cher. When he was diagnosed with Reiter's syndrome, a debilitating form of arthritis, his music career was put on pause. He discovered medicinal relief in 1978 after relying on crutches for a year, and moved back to Los Angeles to teach composer Dominic Frontiere how to program synthesizers. While the money was good enough that he was able to buy a home of his own in Laurel Canyon, Freeman soon realized he was no longer interested in music.

He traded the house for a downtown loft and started taking head shots for pocket change. He honed his artistic sense by shooting conceptual nudes abstracted by bent plastic mirrors. He exhibited the semi-surrealist images in a neighborhood café, and he hasn't stopped since.

Along with years of shooting in his studio—including many images of digitally enhanced angels, cowboys and lovers, some of which are featured in his 2000 monograph *Work*—Freeman took a number of road trips with groups of models to the Salton Sea. There, Freeman remembers "moving farther and farther away until I was so far you couldn't even see the model. So I thought, Fuck it, I'll just shoot landscapes."

He eventually transitioned from nude photography to revitalizing abandoned buildings and road signs across the southern California desert landscape, including the Sundowner Motel marquee

near Salton City and La Fiesta Ballroom in Bakersfield. That resulted in his *Desert Realty* series and a book of the same name.

In 2007, on the heels of his spin-off *Urban Realty* series—think surreal images of a Walmart in Palm Springs and a Panda Express in Albuquerque—Freeman was sitting at a Starbucks when another, greater truth sat beside him. He chatted up an attractive male dancer who, he learned over his latte, was a former college swim team captain and had a pool at his home in Los Angeles's South Bay.

"When the universe speaks that loudly, you'd be a fool not to pay attention," he says. The pool was blanketed in filth blown in from the nearby train tracks, but Freeman nonetheless bought a waterproof camera bag for \$35 and dove in. Those early underwater images inspired the dancer's friends, some of whom were also dancers, to pose for Freeman too.

"It kept growing to the point where two dozen models were just hanging out. And that's really how this all started," he says.

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The day after we meet, Freeman makes his way back to the pool, outfitted in his makeshift technical gear. His goal over the next eight hours is to prove that the subversion of the male gaze (with help from a submarine lens and some post-production digital manipulation) is a fitting conceit in 2019's woke-as-fuck environment.

"I think there's an advantage to my being gay in that I don't want my female nudes to be sex objects," he tells me. "I want them to be about grace and movement."

He welcomes seven models—five women and two men—to the pool area. The models move and behave as though they inhabit this slice of suburbia full-time, and as though a crew of strangers aren't watching them. One scarlet-maned woman repeatedly and patiently glides and jumps into the pool at Freeman's direction. She stops swimming only to listen for the next instruction, unfazed by a topless peer practicing sun salutations on the other side of the yard.

Thirty minutes later, Palmieri nods to one of the male models. He disrobes and stands beside the water, calmly baring his phallus and waiting for his turn to dive in. Although Freeman has convinced the men to be part of this *PLAYBOY* cover shoot, he offers them no guarantee they'll make the final cut. "But," he tells me, "if I have anything to say about it, they will."

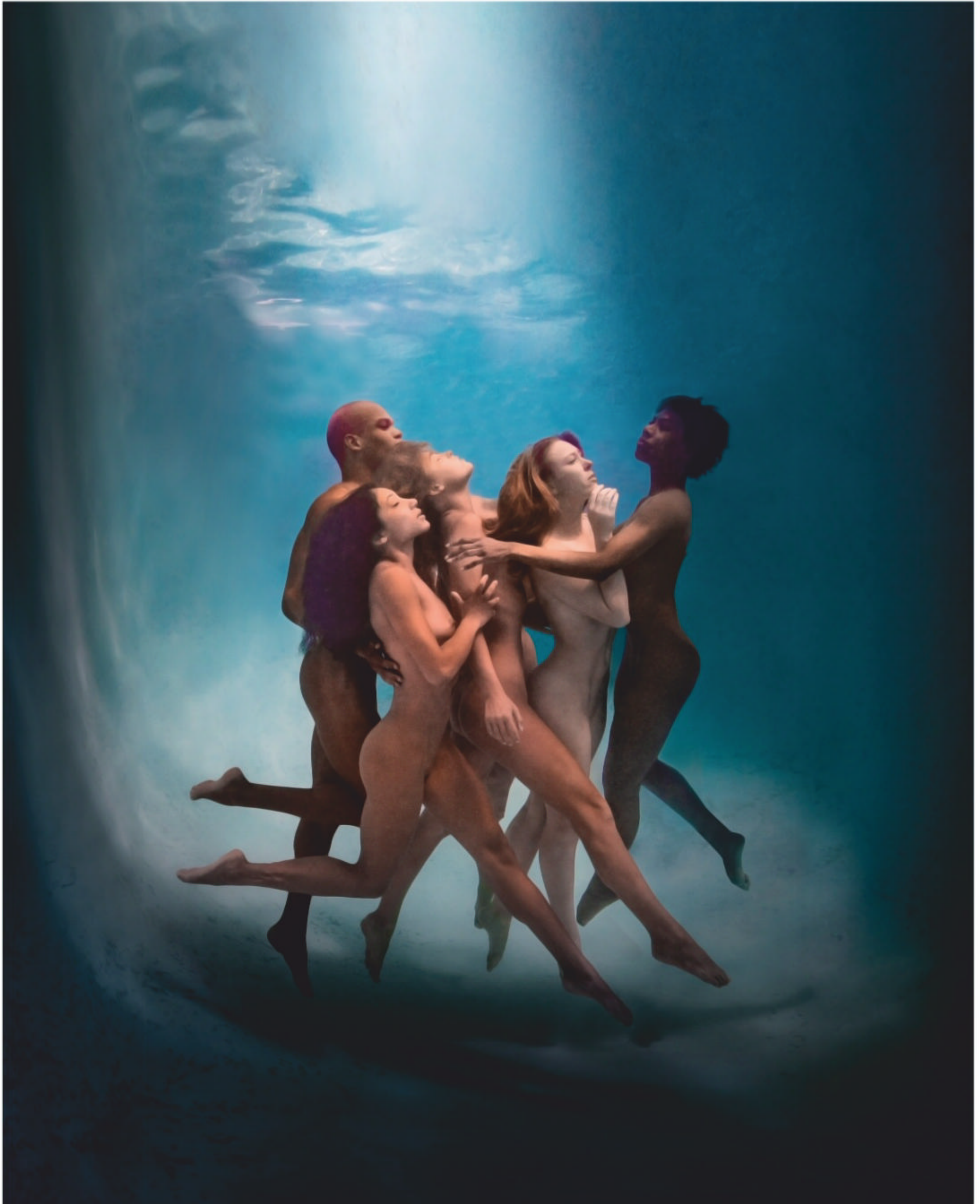
Toward the end of the day, all seven models are told to submerge themselves and cradle one another. "I want to express freedom within this notion of gender identity in the culture, which is very much about an upward and outward movement," explains Freeman. "So this is not going to be pictures with people diving downward."

Freeman instructs them to point and arch their collective extremities. Simultaneously, they all look up at the fading sunlight. The shutter clicks.

"A lot of people tell me, 'This reminds me of Renaissance paintings,'" he says. "That's probably because those paintings were of gorgeous bodies. They weren't sexually interacting; it was just about the beauty of the human form—and that's really what I'm about."

"I WANT TO
EXPRESS
FREEDOM
WITHIN THIS
NOTION OF
GENDER."







Shame,
misinformation,
indomitable
hormones—
Sasheer Zamata
and **Joel Kim**
Booster take us
back to school

MY SEX EDUCA TION

THE ONLY THING MORE TERRIFYING THAN SEX-ED SCARE TACTICS IS THE WAY I TREATED MY MECHANICAL CHILD

BY **SASHEER ZAMATA**

was walking down the street not too long ago, and I overheard a full adult woman say, “I didn’t know you could get pregnant on your first try!” That’s when I realized the world desperately needs better sex education.

I’m including myself in that statement. I had a mortifying moment in college when one of my friends explained how the guy she was sleeping with only wanted to do “doggy style.” I responded, “That’s crazy. He only wants to do anal?” There was silence, and one of my friends slowly asked, “So...do you think when dogs have sex they’re always doing it anally?” And I guess when you say it out loud, it sounds dumb. Of course they’re not always doing it anally—most of them save that for birthdays and bribes. But I wasn’t thinking of the logistics of canine coitus. I honestly wasn’t thinking of sex at all, because I was taught not to.

I was raised in Indiana, and my sex education was pretty much “don’t.” I remember a slide show of STIs in my middle school health class featuring images of cauliflower sprouting out of someone’s ass, or blood and pus oozing from someone’s eyeball, and those were used as evidence for why we should abstain. I went to a public school, so they weren’t telling us to save ourselves for religious reasons—they just weren’t telling us anything.

Our class participated in the Baby Think It Over program, in which students take care of a robot baby to learn how hard it is to care for a human baby. I guess we were supposed to “think over” whether or not it’s worth it to have kids while still in school. I had killed multiple Tamagotchis by this point, so I wasn’t feeling good about my chances of being a good robot mom, but I wanted to at least pass the assignment.

The baby had a computer in it to record how often I fed, held, changed and nurtured it (which is kind of what I currently do in my relationship). It would also cry, and I just had to guess why (which is what my partner does in our relationship). It was so annoying. Sometimes I just let the baby wail because I was busy with other homework. There was one day when I ran to the bus while holding my bundle of joy, and her head was flopping back and forth, so that



probably wasn’t good. At the end of the experiment, the teacher pulled together all the counts of neglect and abuse to give me a grade. Apparently I had a lot of counts of neglect and abuse. Someone from Child Protective Services—I’m hoping an intern and not someone who could be helping real children—came to my school to talk to all the bad student-parents. They took me into a room and warned me that if this were a real baby, they would take her from me. And my response was, “Good! I didn’t ask for this baby!” They didn’t care about my protest.

I wish I had said, “You know what would’ve been more useful? Telling me how not to have a baby instead of showing me how hard life is with one. Embarrassing me in class by making me roll a condom over a banana so I’m not too embarrassed to do it with an actual penis in front of me. Giving me language I can use to ask my partners about their sexual history and health so I’m not speechless in the moment. Teaching me that sex can be an enjoyable experience between consenting parties and doesn’t have to be a shameful, detrimental act.”

It can be easy not to have a baby if you don’t want one—you just need access to resources and information, which is getting tougher these days. Let’s keep spreading knowledge so people can have more control of their lives and know how to get rid of the cauliflower in their butt. ■

N

o one had to teach me how to come. Every afternoon, I'd lie on the cold linoleum of my family's bathroom, turn on the shower for sonic camouflage and get to work on myself. Like a prodigy with no formal training, I was a natural. Maybe I couldn't read sheet music, and the finger placement was definitely off, but lying there, clutching my instrument, I learned what my body was capable of.

My parents, blue-collar conservative Christians, homeschooled me for most of my adolescence in an attempt to protect me from the secular world and its corrupting notions of liberalism and science. For their own edification they purchased a book on talking to your son about sex, which I would secretly take from their shelves and study solemnly in my bed at night. There I discovered that my white pee was actually called "semen" and, in the final and shortest chapter, titled simply "Homosexuality," that the urges I'd been visualizing while making the white pee (fueled by old *Archie* comic books) were unnatural and wrong. Turned out all those tiny, messy miracles weren't miracles at all.

If instinct was my teacher, then shame became my tutor. In the years that followed, I'd spend approximately 15 minutes of each day on that bathroom floor and the rest of my waking hours working out how and when I'd be going to hell for it.

Soon I graduated from the bathroom to a corner of our basement, where my parents had foolishly placed our brand-new computer. The creaky stairwell served as a de facto lookout while I entered such imaginative terms into the pre-Google search bar as *gay* and *gay sex*. In the waning days of dial-up it wasn't unusual for me to wait a full 20 minutes as our Dell PC loaded, line by line, a horrifically photoshopped image of George Clooney receiving a blow job from Brad Pitt. I learned about anal sex from erotic gay fan fiction, which always made it seem so simple and spontaneous. Obi-Wan never once shat on Qui-Gon's dick. Maybe it was the Force.

When I turned 16, my parents reluctantly sent me off to public school. My entry into the real world would coincide with our school district's mandatory sex-ed class, years too late to be anything but an exercise in not making eye contact with the teacher. By this point all of us had enrolled in a rigorous course of our own

design, consisting of facts and fictions cobbled together from internet porn and various misremembered half-truths some older brother brought home from college. It was like a game of telephone played by hundreds of teenage boys with wild ideas about the viability of their sperm in a hot tub.

After little more than a month at public school, I tearfully came out to a friend during lunch period. A short lifetime of shame and mortal fear—I set it all aside in that moment because the smell of Axe body spray got me hard. Sadly, it still does.

The sex-ed class came to an end, but my education did not. (That same year I met my first boyfriend, who was also the first man I heard whisper "teeth" with erotic caution as I gave head for the first time, a VHS tape of his eighth-grade production of *The Music Man* playing in the background.) Every new experience, even the many, *many* humiliating ones, felt like a revelation.

"That was sex!" I would say to myself. I eventually realized that it wasn't, but I would go on to learn things they forgot to teach us: about consent, about the different ways we experience desire, about the ways our bodies betray us. But I still go back to those teenage moments—fucking in the backseat of a Pontiac Sunfire parked inconspicuously in an empty Target lot—when it all felt miraculous again. ■

**FOR AMERICAN KIDS
LIKE ME, SEX ED HAS
ALWAYS BEEN EQUAL
PARTS CLASSROOM
AND SCHOOLYARD
(WITH A HEALTHY
DASH OF BASEMENT
REC ROOM)**

BY **JOEL KIM BOOSTER**



PLAYBOY'S party jokes



TAKEOVER TIME! THIS BATCH COMES
TO YOU VIA *THE LATE LATE SHOW*
HEAD WRITER IAN KARMEL AND A
FEW FIERCELY FUNNY FRIENDS



SEX with me is like a trip to Epcot Center: It sucks.—*I.K.*

I'M not saying men are desperate, but I once said "I love the band Elton John" on a date, and the man still slept with me.—*Marcia Belsky*

I don't think of a man as an ally until he hands me his unlocked cell phone and walks out of the room.—*Bri Pruett*

THE year is 2055. An elderly husband and wife are reading in bed. The wife turns to the husband and says, "Kyle, I want you to fuck me like you fucked me on our wedding night."

The husband puts his book down. "Honey, I'd love to," he says, "but I simply don't have \$80,000 worth of student debt for you to absorb anymore."—*I.K.*

THREESOMES *sound* like a great idea, but so does a boxing league of kangaroos.—*Amy Silverberg*

POLYAMORY is a lot like a graduate program: full of vegan parents scheduling things.—*B.P.*

A taco salad is the perfect food for making people think you're eating healthy: *Salad* is right there in the name, but it's actually just the biggest possible taco.—*I.K.*

I once dated a girl whose dog Rufus would watch us having sex. Then I found and destroyed his webcam, and that was that.—*I.K.*

HAVING sex in your 30s is like being a urologist: Mostly you're just telling men their dicks are fine.—*B.P.*

A girl once told me she wanted to fuck like we were in a porno, so I arranged for my dad to marry her.—*I.K.*

OUR Unabashed Dictionary now includes the following variations on the term *sexting*...

Flexting: Sexy texting at the gym.

Brexting: Sexy texting while legally separating from the European Union.

Tex-mexting: Sexy texting with Bobby Flay.

BDSMS: Sexy texting while wearing a latex hood, and also your 4G went out.—*I.K.*



PLAYBOY ADVISOR

We're thrilled to present this issue's special guest Advisor: world-renowned therapist and author **Esther Perel**. Read on as she tackles your questions about fantasies, fidelity, foreplay and much more

Q: *I'm a woman in my early 20s, in a relationship with a man in his mid-40s. I'm not concerned about the age difference, but the financial difference is dramatic. I live paycheck to paycheck; he makes seven figures a year. Whenever he takes me out, I can't afford to go 50-50. As a feminist, I feel infantilized having an older man pay for everything. How can I feel like I'm contributing equally?*

A: Contribution is about value; it's not only about dollars. You may not be able to afford a fancy meal, but you can invite him over and cook, no matter how small your space, or you can say, "There's a nice taco truck down the street." Evenings like those can be just as exotic and fun as dinner at a Michelin-starred restaurant. It's about the gesture with which you say, "I too can contribute to our relationship. I love to give you things, even if it's not half the check."

Egalitarianism isn't always symmetry; complementarity and fairness are the goals here. So whatever you do, don't let the discrepancy between your bank accounts keep you from taking any initiative because you think that what you have to offer isn't equal in amount. It's equal in meaning. (For his part, don't forget that he knows who he picked.)

You mention you're a feminist. What I make of that is that somebody may have told you that an older man shouldn't be paying your way. That's a ready-made idea. Why can't a feminist be taken care of by a man—or a woman, for that matter? It doesn't mean you don't have your own means. And you're in your early 20s; this is a developmental situation trans-

lated into an ideological one. (When you're 46 we'll discuss it again.) I wish for you to find myriad ways to express your identity, your feminist ideas *and* your feelings for this man.

Q: *What advice would you give to straight men who want to be better in bed?*

A: Good sex is far less about mechanics and performance and far more about erotic intelligence. That's why the number one thing is this: *Slow down*. Don't go instantly looking for the spot—the genitals, the butt, the clit. Know that foreplay is not five minutes before the "real thing"—penetration, orgasm (often only yours) and then sleep. For many women, the real thing includes everything before and after, and what's between her ears matters as much as what's between her legs. Understand the erotic power of words and that when the lips around the mouth open, so will those other lips you're so interested in. (Know also that a great kisser is irresistible.)

This might surprise you, but don't go specifically chasing her orgasm. Your ability as a lover is not measured by her ability to peak. Erotic highs are as much about pleasure and excitement as they are about coming—and nothing is more of an orgasm killer than pressure. She'll fake it just to cut the pressure short, and you will never know. So focus on pleasing her. What she enjoys is your attention on her, your desire for her, your lavishing and ravishing her and making her feel irresistible. It's in these moments that women feel they can let go and enjoy themselves.

Here is something else I want you to know: Desire isn't just this spontaneous thing that sweeps over you in an irresistible wave. There are many ways for women to engage in sex. Sometimes she's aroused, other times she has desire but isn't yet turned on, and then there are the times when she's willing, not because she's hot or in the mood but simply because she's open to see what will happen. For women, sexual desire can be responsive like that. And sometimes they anticipate pressure from you even when it's not there, so if they touch you and you get turned on, they worry they'll have to go all the way—before they've decided if they want to. If they could do some simmering, kissing, stroking, turning on and then leaving, staying turned on and falling asleep in a state of arousal, they would love it. And if you really want to be a better lover, keep that in mind.

Q: *It's hard for me to witness my partner's many fantasies about other people. What am I supposed to make of this?*

A: There are really two questions here: one about the nature of fantasy and another about what your partner's fantasies mean to you and *about* you. These have very different answers.

To address the first question: If you really want to know what people are longing for in sex, look at their fantasies. Fantasies express some of our deepest emotional needs in the language of sex. But they're not simple; they're like dreams that have to be decoded. If you can find the curiosity to engage in a conversation with your partner about his

If you really want to know what people are longing for in sex, look at their fantasies. Fantasies express some of our deepest emotional needs in the language of sex. But they're not simple; they're like dreams that have to be decoded.

fantasies, you may find yourself having one of the most fascinating chats two people can have.

And then there's the question of you and your feelings. Does it seem as if your partner is being secretive in his erotic imaginings, or does your discomfort result from a lack of confidence on your part? Some people interpret their partner's fantasies as a statement that something is lacking, but you could very well be included in the plot. And while the modern romantic ideal suggests that we should be able to fulfill *all* our partners' erotic needs, that's not necessarily the case. Either way, fantasies about others don't mean you're not loved or desired. Our erotic mind is a place where we often find the freedom to let our imagination roam. There can be something playful and deeply satisfying for both partners in exploring that.

So what can you do to feel more comfortable with your partner's fantasies? First, be honest with yourself: Do *you* ever have fantasies about anybody or anything else? Then, here's how I would broach it: You can tell him that the very thought of him imagining himself with other women makes you question the security of the relationship. Try to acknowledge your fear without turning it into an accusation that there's something wrong with what he does. Use that as a starting point to figure out what belongs to you versus what belongs to him.

From there you can ask him to describe his fantasies and how long he's been having them. Ask for an invitation to the antechamber of his erotic mind. That place of imaginings is more sacred, more sensitive than any of the orifices we penetrate. Try to stay curious, even if it scares you. One person's delight can be

another's distaste—that's in the nature of our erotic blueprints.

As he tells you his stories, remember: Sexual fantasies are not necessarily literal narratives of secret intentions. I've seen many people fantasize about things they would never dare do in reality. Understanding the meaning of your partner's turn-ons is often what makes them less frightening. I could very well imagine you developing a safe space to experience the pleasure of fantasy together—in a way that would invigorate a loving relationship.

Q: *My wife wants sex more often than I do. I can't keep up. Sex has become an obligation, and when I say no over and over, I feel as though I'm failing her as a man. My whole life I've been horny, but now I don't even want to masturbate. What is going on with my sex drive, and what do I do about it?*

A: We have this notion that men should want sex anytime, anywhere, any way—that male sexuality is driven by hormones and no matter what's happening in their lives they're always up for it. Women who don't have desire don't question their identity as women, and yet men who struggle with desire often worry that they're not "real" men.

Let's debunk this myth. For all of us, sexuality is both psychological and biological.

What's going on in your life can kill your libido. If you're anxious, if you've experienced loss, if you're depressed or worried about your job—well, are you surprised you may not be so interested in sex? (Some men, but not all, do indeed turn to sex to alleviate their anxieties.) So what circumstances might be affecting your sexuality?

And what's going on in your relation-

ship with your wife? Has she too bought into the idea that you should come ready for the job, with a penis like steel, prepared to go at it for two hours? Do you feel pressured, by your wife or your notions of manhood, to perform? Or is your challenge about getting turned on? About feeling worthy? About feeling uninspired? Your situation may not be sexual; it could be relational. For most of history, women have resorted to the power of refusal. Perhaps this is what's happening with you: "If I have to, I don't want to and you can't make me." Consider that your anxieties around sex could be less about your penis and more about power.

Q: *My partner sexts lots of other women but never sleeps with them. Is this a form of infidelity?*

A: These days you can cheat while lying right next to your partner in bed, so it's more urgent than ever that we have these conversations in which we draw the lines of our relationships: what is in, what is out, what is fantasy and what is betrayal. It's both a negotiation and a conversation that most straight couples don't have until the shit hits the fan. When there's a crisis of infidelity, suddenly couples start to talk about boundaries and transgression, privacy and secrecy—when, in fact, it should be a mandatory conversation that unfolds as a relationship develops.

So ask him, "What does sexting mean for you? What does it do for you? Do you like it or do you *need* it?" When you bring it up with him, pay attention to whether his reaction is respectful and empathetic or defensive. Does he label you "insecure" when it may very well be his own insecurity that keeps sending him back to his phone, hunting for ego strokes?



Esther Perel offers more sex and relationship advice via *Rekindling Desire*, an online workshop, and the podcast *Where Should We Begin?*, the third season of which is slated to launch this summer on Apple Podcasts.

What's at stake here is this: Either his flirting will divert erotic energy away from you, leaving you hungry for the attention that he so generously gives to others, or he's a man who works up his appetite someplace else but comes home to dine on you. Figure that out and you'll get a sense of whether it's an innocent pleasure—a reassurance of his sexiness and mojo—or a more nefarious undercurrent that's destabilizing your relationship.

Q: *I want to have more sexual experiences, but I get attached after hooking up with someone, even when it's just a few times. Is there a way I can get more comfortable with one-night stands?*

A: In the past, people were embarrassed if they had sex. Today, people are embarrassed if they *don't* have sex. The judgment has changed, but the tyranny is still there.

Allow me to ask you: Why do you want to have more sexual experiences? Is it because you want to or because you think you should? Even more important: Is hooking up your thing? If it isn't, simply don't do it, regardless of the social pressure.

It sounds as though you feel that when you open up sexually, you also open up your heart. So what? That's actually a nice thing. Sex involves the penetration of boundaries and the exchange of

fluids, to say the least; of course one feels a connection. There's nothing glamorous about trying to make sex meaningless, even if it's recreational.

That said, if you want to be more playful and uncommitted, you'll need to be able to ask your partners, "Is this just a one-night stand, or are you open to something else coming out of this?" If they're just passing by, then you make your decision. If you don't like it, don't agonize over the reason—and don't try to force yourself into something that leaves you feeling empty afterward. We often spend years trying to be who we think we should be before we finally accept who we are.

Q: *Last week I started catching up with my ex over text. We broke up more than a year ago, but there was a lack of closure, and a lot of feelings resurfaced. When my current boyfriend of six months was going down on me, I got lost in my thoughts about my ex, and right after I came, I burst into tears. My boyfriend misread it as a monumental moment of intimacy between us, and then he started tearing up because he thought it was so beautiful. I didn't have the heart to tell him the truth. Was I wrong to go along with it?*

A: No, you weren't wrong. He has nothing to do with this. If at some point you

realize you're not really in love with him, then you tell him that. Meanwhile, you have a man who had a beautiful response and was moved by how vulnerable you were, and that's a good thing. I hope you can value that too.

As you may have noticed, I place a lot of emphasis on communication, but I also think wholesale sharing and all-out transparency can be insensitive. Before you tell him about your ex, ask yourself what it would be like for him to live with your confession. Given that he took your tears as a sign of intimacy and vulnerability, he would probably feel humiliated if you told him you were actually crying because you were thinking about your ex. I see no point in telling him. Decide what you want to do—talk to somebody else if you think it will help you gain clarity—but know that your new guy can't help you deal with the leftovers of your ex.

Continuing to text your ex is not going to help you either. It's a form of rumination, an unhealthy lingering, that your new boyfriend is probably not going to be able to compete with, and so it's probably wise to put a halt to it. More than your misinterpreted tears, I'm concerned about the way you've recruited your new man for a part he hasn't auditioned for. Respect both men, and yourself, by dealing with your inner conflict and unfinished business without their help. ■



★macy's



**PLAYBOY
INTERVIEW:**

TARANA BURKE

A candid conversation with the activist who launched Me Too—more than a decade prior to Weinsteingate—on backlash, boundaries and the future of the movement

Before Me Too was a hashtag, before social media gave everyday people the power to have public conversations about sexual harassment, assault and rape—and before the inevitable and ongoing backlash—Tarana Burke was working with young girls, most of them black, encouraging them to share their most traumatic stories by offering her own. Now 45 years old, the Bronx-bred activist has spent some two decades providing space for those testimonies.

In 2003, Burke launched an organization that would eventually become Just Be Inc., offering fellowship and programming meant to empower young women of color. One of its first campaigns, which Burke named Me Too, showed survivors of all genders that even their darkest trauma could be processed within a

community—that together they could change what feminists have long called rape culture. Soon Burke's organization relocated from Selma, Alabama, near her alma mater of Auburn University, to Philadelphia. In 2015, having reached thousands of girls, she moved back to New York and put the program on hiatus.

Flash forward to October 15, 2017: Ten days after *The New York Times* published a landmark story on the sexual-assault allegations against Harvey Weinstein, the name of Burke's campaign went viral thanks to a tweet by Alyssa Milano. Burke felt blindsided. And now that scores of powerful men have been taken to task and #MeToo has come to define this historical moment, she is an icon—a reluctant icon, but one with the substance and vision to make the moment a movement.

The blowback against Me Too has been no less sweeping than its viral reincarnation. It looks like Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos dismantling Title IX on college campuses, privileging the reputations of young men accused of rape. It looks like Louis C.K. quietly returning to the stage, his routine unaffected after an initial half-hearted apology. It looks like Russell Simmons posting #NotMe after several women accused him of rape. It looks like Wall Street firms warning men, Mike Pence-style, to avoid off-site meetings with their women colleagues, the implication being that the real threat is false accusations. And it looks like Burke facing condemnation from certain black men who've accused her of race betrayal for publicly standing with the accusers of Simmons, Bill Cosby, Nate Parker and R. Kelly.



"I'm a black woman who loves black people, who has fought with and for black men almost as much as black women."



"A friend of mine sent me a message: 'Congratulations, people are talking about Me Too.' I was like, 'What?'"



"It's one thing to say, 'I'm so sorry if anyone was offended.' It's a different thing to take ownership and responsibility."

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **CARISSA GALLO**

As she fields the vitriol, with sources ranging from anonymous trolls to White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders, Burke is subject to another sort of attention: She's constantly spotted in public and pulled into corners where survivors not only thank her for her work but often share, unsolicited, the stories of their own trauma. She has built some boundaries while navigating her newfound status as one of the most recognizable women in the country; other boundaries she formed after suffering abuse as a child.

In the hope of glimpsing the future of Me Too and its creator, we partnered with **dream hampton**—writer, filmmaker, activist and executive producer of *Surviving R. Kelly*, the Lifetime docuseries that broke records when it aired in January. (The series features Burke as an on-screen expert.) This past March, Burke and hampton met up in New Orleans; Burke, who spends much of her time on the road, was in town for the season-two premiere of the video series *Professional Black Girl*. Hampton reports: “New Orleans is a city that celebrates sex and fertility and the awakening of spring the ancient way—by playing naked and in public with a days-long parade. The city was an early home away from home for Burke, one where as a teenage activist she learned strategy from the Southerners she convened with. (During leadership-development camp her peers would teach her the ancient art of pussy popping, which we also discussed.) In person, she laughs easily. She flirts. She shows up for her girlfriends, supporting their projects and passions and gossip in group chats. She's a mother, and we often talk about what it's like to parent a 20-something.

“Burke remains not only a dreamer but, remarkably, an optimist. She knows there's no easy healing for the wounds exposed by #MeToo, and yet she stays in the work. We talked about the challenges of bringing the movement against sexual violence home to our black community—and the profound pain that comes with being targeted by other black people for doing so. We talked about self-care in the

age of the online drag, about what healthy sex between teenagers might look like (hint: It involves the absence of R. Kelly) and about bracing for blowback. What unfolded during our conversation was a vivid picture of the movement and some ideas about where it might go—from consent to real male accountability and beyond.”

PLAYBOY: We're in New Orleans, which is the site of much joy and obviously a lot of trauma. I'm thinking of course about



Hurricane Katrina and what followed—what Naomi Klein has called “disaster capitalism.” What does this city mean to you?

BURKE: Whew, New Orleans. I've been coming here since I was a young activist. An organization I was working with, Tambourine and Fan, had a big presence here. The founder of Tam and Fan was a guy known as Big Duck—a civil rights legend. But we were connected to Tam and Fan here, and New Orleans always represented at our annual leadership-development camps. When they would come to camp, they were so full of life. Before they called it twerking, the New Orleans kids at camp taught us this dance called pussy popping. [laughs]

You might not want to put that in there. **PLAYBOY:** This is PLAYBOY. I don't see why we wouldn't.

BURKE: Ha! It was 1989, 1990, and I was coming from New York, doing the wop and shit, and they were like, “Pop that coochie.” We did not dance like that, but the New Orleans kids were always so free. Everybody came from around the country. The people who ran the camp were from Alabama, and some of the elders were a little conservative. So we would have parties, little dances, and we'd be going off. They'd be like, “Y'all stop that! Y'all cut it out!” But Big Duck would say, “Let them children dance. Let them be free.” He allowed us to do what we wanted. So I always associated New Orleans with freedom and that kind of black joy and unabashed blackness. But they also had a lot of tragedy. It's not a joke at all, but it was sort of a running theme that every year they had a different RIP T-shirt. Every year somebody in their community had been killed. But it felt as though they'd mastered how to walk through tragedy. They'd be sad, they'd be down, but they'd always find a reason to celebrate. I just love my folks from here, and I love this city.

PLAYBOY: When you talk about these camp dances, I think about how some of the blowback I got from making *Surviving R. Kelly* has devolved. In the beginning some of Kelly's fans on social media had the nerve to argue that, because he was acquitted in 2008, he was innocent. And then, after the Gayle King interview, I started getting a different kind of pushback: grown men saying, “Well, teenagers have sex”—as if teenagers exploring their own sexuality is an invitation to prey on them. I didn't respond to any of those people, but my response would have been “Yes, 14-year-olds should be exploring sex—with other 14-year-olds.”

BURKE: Yes! With people in their own age group.

PLAYBOY: I bring this up because I know you're very sex positive.

BURKE: For sure.

PLAYBOY: So tell me about being sex

positive in your talks with teenagers when you also want to warn them about predators. **BURKE:** It's such a prime age. By the time my body was changing, I'd already been molested. I wasn't experimenting because of my experience, but I was watching it happen around me. It was just pure curiosity. I remember friends wondering about the size and shape of real penises, and there's nothing wrong with that. The problem is when you have predators in the community. And when you compound that with being in low-wealth communities, you get this disgusting, for lack of a better way to put it, mix of grown men who know these girls are both blossoming and exploring—and they're also poor and want the kind of creature comforts most people want. They want their nails done. They want their cell phones paid for. They want their hair done. And the men use that to manipulate them. The problem I saw as an adult working with sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade kids was these older men, some who even looked young, coming around girls they knew were interested and dangling these things. You know, "I'll pay your cell phone bill" or "I'll take you to get your nails done," and they want favors in return. It's a manipulative relationship. The men are on the hunt for the particular kind of girl who's susceptible to this. And on the girls' end—we have all this research about brain development in young people and what they can and can't understand and handle. Yes, they may be sexual, but they're not in a position to deal with the kind of manipulation these men introduce into their lives this early. It's awful, and I've seen it happen over and over.

PLAYBOY: Before MeToo broke as a hashtag, conversations around street harassment had been trending. It was one of the first times I saw the organizing possibilities of storytelling on Twitter. There was so much power in amplifying people's stories, but it was also incredibly depressing to think how widespread these experiences are for girls and women.

BURKE: Actually, I met my daughter's father, my first real boyfriend, by being harassed. I ran track, so I was really skinny, but I had a butt. He would see me in the hallway in school and say stuff to me all the time, and I was embarrassed by it. I had my only pair of Girbaud jeans with the button fly and my little riding boots, and I was so happy—but then

he started talking about my butt, and I didn't want to wear them anymore. I became aware of my body because of men in the streets saying stuff about having a booty. I grew up in the Bronx, and in the summer we would go downtown to Harlem. So you walked these gauntlets over and over again.

PLAYBOY: That's what it is, a gauntlet.

BURKE: That's the prime time when you want attention, but you want to have some control and some autonomy, and they take it from you. Because there's always the chance you can get smacked on the butt. Or if you don't respond in the right way, there's a chance that you'll have to fight, which is a real thing. I went through

For so many young girls, black girls, we learn early how to figure out our own safety.

lots of painstakingly ridiculous things to avoid that. I think for so many young girls, black girls, we learn early how to figure out our own safety—how to navigate getting in and out of our building, in and out of the park, to the movie theater, all these spaces, without being harassed. It almost becomes second nature. So when people started asking me about harassment, I was like, "I'm worrying about not getting *attacked*." Harassment? I have built-in defenses for that. I didn't even think about it. God, we have so much accumulated shit around that alone.

When I had my daughter, Kaia—tall, slim, cute—I remember walking with her when she was about 12 or 13, already taller than me, and this group of boys were coming, older teenagers, maybe some in their early 20s, and there was this moment when a separate group of girls were coming in the guys' direction. The girls were teenagers, loud, laughing, whatever, and

the boys were saying all types of stuff to them. I wanted so badly to say, "Leave these girls alone and just go on about your business." But I also didn't want to bring attention to my daughter. They got past, and the girls said whatever they said to them, and then they saw Kaia. One guy was like, "That's what I need...." My daughter was petrified. She's looking at me; she doesn't know what to do. So I jumped in and said to them, "Can I help you?" They kind of straightened up, but what would she do if I wasn't here? She's not built the same way I was. She's not dealing with this all the time like I was. It's the first time I saw how *not* normal it is to have to go through life dealing with this shit.

PLAYBOY: I had the same experience, in Harlem. It was actually a factor in my picking up and leaving New York: I felt both homicidal and helpless. But back to the organizing possibilities of Twitter. I want to revisit the full origin story of how the MeToo hashtag became a movement.

BURKE: Days before #MeToo happened, white women on Twitter were organizing to have a day of absence. The week before Alyssa Milano tweeted "Me too," Rose McGowan was suspended on Twitter. People accused Twitter of putting her in Twitter jail for tweeting about Harvey Weinstein and the things she said happened to her. Women on Twitter were angry because they believed it was silencing McGowan, and the response was "We should have a day without women on Twitter. Let's show them what it looks like *blah, blah, blah*." The response of black women and women of color was "Oh, now y'all want to shut down Twitter when they bothering this white woman. What happened when Leslie Jones was being harassed on Twitter?" I was actually not a Twitter person; I had maybe 500 followers, so I was watching this from afar. Black women were like, "No, we're not getting off Twitter for a day. That's not for us. That's for you. You all rally around white women, but you don't rally around black women or women of color."

PLAYBOY: And of course *Day of Absence* is a 1965 play by Douglas Turner Ward about black people taking a day off of labor. **BURKE:** Right. I thought it was funny. Then the day #MeToo started to trend, a friend of mine sent me a message: "Congratulations, people are talking about Me Too." I was like, "What?"

PLAYBOY: Because you had an organization named Me Too.

BURKE: I had an organization called Just Be Inc., and “Me Too” was a campaign that we started inside the program. Me Too grew on its own, separate from the organization, because so many people called us to do workshops or work with practitioners. We had Me Too T-shirts and paraphernalia and all this other stuff, separate from Just Be. My first thought was, If this trends now, people are going to think I got it from the hashtag. I had a fucking meltdown. I saw it on my friend’s page, and I was like, “Please take this down. Don’t push it further.” I didn’t know what was really happening, that she had nothing to do with making it popular. Then I started trying to figure out where it was coming from, and I didn’t see it in our spaces. I didn’t see black Twitter talking about it at all. I was so confused. My daughter told me how to set it up so you can see just a hashtag, and I saw that hundreds of people were tweeting it at this point. I was like, “Oh, fuck me.”

I felt like my life’s work had been taken overnight. This is the thing I care about more than anything, more than any work I’ve done. I’ve been trying to figure out how to make this—not become a worldwide phenomenon, but just get people to talk, because it’s so hard to get people to deal with sexual violence. I really did not understand the power of social media in this moment, because I’m a 44-year-old black woman who is nobody in the grand scheme of things, right? Why would they listen to me?

But I think this perfect storm happened. I remember sitting up at night, looking at my laptop, watching this hashtag. This person, who I’m assuming was a white woman, had used the MeToo hashtag, and then she had a link in her tweet. So I just clicked the link randomly, and it opened up to a blog post, and it was her story. I read that story, and it was so sad, about her being assaulted on a college campus and how it affected her life. I was like, Oh, fuck, Tarana, you got to pull it together. I had been consumed with “This is my work. How am I going to save this work?” But her story *is* my work. I was trying to save the work, and the work was happening right in front of me.

So I was like, Let me regroup. I had a video in my cell phone from 2014, from

a speech I’d given in Philly at the March to End Rape Culture, which used to be known as SlutWalk. We’d set up a table; we would have our little Me Too T-shirts and handouts, and I’d speak or I’d table, and this happened to be one of those times. In the video I’m wearing my Me Too shirt, and I’m making this speech. I put the video on Twitter and said, “You know, it’s been amazing watching people over the last 24 hours really take to this concept that we created.” And I just kind of took ownership in the moment.

PLAYBOY: But you also made space for other people. That’s such a beautiful pivot in that story. I know the ego of wanting to publicly claim a thing and be proprietary, but it’s not just ego; there’s a history of

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erasure. But then there’s the opening up to be, like, it’s actually about the work.

BURKE: I keep thinking now, if I had gone down this other path and started a fight—because people were ready to fight—it could easily have been “I saw this white woman trying to take our stuff again.” And then that would have died, and what would I have been contributing? It would have just come and gone. It would have been some urban legend, like the black woman who wrote *The Matrix*. People would’ve been like, “I heard *The Matrix* was started by a black person.”

PLAYBOY: Right. That’s a great analogy.

BURKE: So I put the video out, and my friends who had bigger platforms than mine tweeted out the video. Then people started saying, “Wait, who’s this?” People kept tweeting at Alyssa Milano, saying, “You didn’t start this. It already existed.” To Alyssa’s credit, she tweeted out my website, an apology and the origin story,

which is what got people’s attention. On the other end, organizers like Alicia Garza, co-founder of Black Lives Matter, called me and said, “What can we do?” This is all happening in 24 hours. I’m like, “I don’t know.” Alicia was already booked to speak on *Democracy Now!*, and she invited me on with her—which speaks to something I’m always saying about black women: This is what we do. We would not be here if not for the generosity and connection of black women. I still thought, This is nice; for a week I get to talk about sexual violence. This is something I’ve been thinking about forever, but it’s actually happening. But before the week was over I got another message from Alyssa, and she invited me on *Good Morning America*. Then I was like, “Oh, shit. This is for real.”

PLAYBOY: What’s been amazing is that it’s not stopping. But then I get into full dystopia mode and think about what could be the blowback to #MeToo—I mean, Trump is absolutely the result of blowback to the idea and audacity of having a black man as president. So when I see a *New York Times* list of 201 high-powered men who have lost their jobs because of the #MeToo movement, I wonder what the blowback might be. There have been early wins, but also more conservative judges are being seated than at any other time in my life, and whether or not *Roe v. Wade* becomes the 2020 issue that immigration will surely

be, it will be a pivotal battle that will be fought again. And then we see things like Russell Simmons posting #NotMe—

BURKE: I think in some ways it’s going to get worse before it gets better. What’s discouraging is that I thought this was going to be an opportunity for us—and by “us,” I mean the black community, because that’s where my focus is as an organizer—to start peeling back layers of trauma and silence around sexual violence. But instead, so many in our community are planting our feet more firmly in patriarchy. Watching these black people who are going so hard in the other direction is heartbreaking. We might have changed a few minds—and I know those who are digging in may never change their minds—but I also try to look at the whole picture. The question I always ask is “Are we accomplishing what we need to accomplish?”

PLAYBOY: And are we?



BURKE: The corporate people are going to change this, change that, but they often do things that are outward-facing, that make people happy enough to be quiet. There are traditional feminist conversations about women being promoted. We won't see that for a few years, when we get new statistics. We also have this fight happening around sexual violence on college campuses, but at the same time you have Betsy DeVos chipping away at Title IX and taking away these rights. We won't see that for a few years. So part of me is always thinking about what we can't see happening right now.

PLAYBOY: Let's unpack this: What is Title IX, and how is DeVos attempting to dismantle it?

BURKE: Title IX has been a tool a lot of schools have used to fight sexual violence. It gives you a framework to do investigations, to file complaints, and for survivors of sexual violence on campus to have some kind of recourse. What she's proposing is giving more rights to the respondent, the accused. She wants to allow respondents to cross-examine their accusers. She's operating from the idea that the way Title IX is implemented in these schools is unfair and allows for too many false accusations. I don't even think that's the language she uses, but it's like she's really doubling down on "boys will be boys," that young men have these moments and it shouldn't scar their lives forever. More important, she's calling to defund campus programs that we know work. They're doing what the right wing always does, which is trying to deregulate it federally so the states can regulate it, and then the states are like, "Oh well."

PLAYBOY: I imagine many PLAYBOY readers are men who might think that allowing someone who has been accused to cross-examine their accuser isn't such a bad thing. But that's not even how it would happen in an actual judicial process, correct?

BURKE: To be fair, the way it's set up is that the respondent would have to submit their questions to their attorney or an intermediary person, but it gets to the schools. And then you have them in a position to answer questions like "What were you wearing? Why did you come to my room?" We've been past this already. We have laws on the books that say a person's disclosure is evidence. That's why you see activists with signs that say

I'M THE EVIDENCE. People's voices and stories have been accepted as evidence in cases of sexual violence. Now you're rolling that back and allowing an accused person on a campus to communicate to a victim, "Talk to me about why you let me kiss you like that if you didn't want to have sex." Imagine that. It sets up a situation that is retraumatizing for the accuser.

I think we can figure out what is fair and balanced. I also think that sometimes when we say "Believe women" and "Believe survivors," it's taken out of context. People may not understand that we say "Believe survivors" because up until now people have started with the premise that the accusers are lying, and that

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when people, particularly women, disclose, people start with a set of questions and a reasoning that says, "There has to be something you did."

PLAYBOY: Which is also different from a presumption of innocence, because you're actually shifting guilt onto the victim, or the accuser.

BURKE: My argument is that investigation into credible and serious claims of sexual violence should be respectful. You handle it with the gravity you would an attempted murder. You investigate. You collect evidence. You talk to the people involved. You deal with it. You don't start with "Are you sure? What did you do? Where were you at?"

PLAYBOY: I think what they're supposed to do is determine whether or not a story is credible—not even believable—and investigate from there. But what you're saying is that the credibility is the first thing attacked.

BURKE: They attack the credibility immediately. Exactly.

PLAYBOY: We've seen this kind of push-back from men before. It brings back to mind the idea that we have to re-fight struggles. For me, this includes the black feminist struggle. Black men saying we're throwing them under the bus and piling on to multiple oppressions when we speak up about sexual and gender violence is an issue another generation of black feminists has already addressed. It's almost as if we have to start all over again. So in the face of all that, how do you take care of yourself, pace yourself, protect your actual safety?

BURKE: I have new boundaries. I'm also fresh out of fucks. I don't really have to deal with a lot of shit that I dealt with before, and I feel okay about that. I'm good with saying no. I'd kind of figured out how to navigate through life in ways that made me feel comfortable, and I felt comfortable in my skin. This recent visibility upended all that for a moment. I remember it was all fun and lovely in those first few weeks, and then CNN did a pull-out video of me. They had makeup on me, and it was in extreme close-up, the way that they do, and when the video came out, it was the first time I got trolls—people tweeting and leaving comments like "God, she's hideous," "She's ugly," "Get her off the screen." My first thought was, I don't want my daughter to see this. Then it was, I don't want to do this anymore. I went into full panic mode.

Even public speaking, I still talk like I talk. I didn't want to deal with those things, and I've never had to, because I'm an organizer; I was always fine with other people doing the forward-facing work. But now I have this new set of responsibilities and this new role, and it hasn't slowed down like I thought it might. It's been nonstop. Bill Cosby may bring out the black men, but depending on what's happening in the news, I'm just as likely to be trolled by white people. During Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation hearings, it was the Trump people, white men and women, calling me all kinds of horrible names. When #MeToo India trended, I got Indian men sending me horrible messages that I couldn't even read.

PLAYBOY: I'm so mad. I'm so mad.

BURKE: It's because I'm not just a black

woman; I'm a black woman who loves black people, who has spent my life in service to black people, and who loves black men, who has fought side by side with and for black men almost as much as black women. And so to hear.... I know it's not real. What helps is when I go out into the world and get off social media.

PLAYBOY: I'm a big fan of deactivating. I understand that social media can be life-saving for people who feel isolated, but I've had experiences that have pushed me to limit my online presence.

Back in January, there was an uproar over a tweet of yours—the one that said, in part, “When should black men be held accountable for their predatory behavior?! And why is it *my* job to ‘go after’ white men?”

BURKE: When that first damn thing hit and that one tweet got taken out of context, Tariq Nasheed and his folks took that “white men” line and tried to make it like, “See, she told on herself. She's only going after black men.” I was like, “The rest of the thread says, ‘We have spent almost two years talking about white men.’”

PLAYBOY: Period.

BURKE: Right? Y'all weren't paying attention, because it didn't affect you. So we've talked about Harvey Weinstein ad nauseam, and Kevin Spacey and Matt Lauer and Louis C.K. and Charlie Rose. We've talked about nothing but white men. And honestly, black men have gotten away in this moment. There has been only Bill Cosby and R. Kelly. Russell Simmons has, at last count, at least a dozen credible accusations against him. A.J. Callo-way is up to six public allegations. I didn't go after any of those men. We could easily have taken on any one of those and tried to make it into a thing, but the media didn't take it on. I'm still trying to unpack why. I think part of it is because it's black victims, black survivors. But these stories come and go. The bottom line is black men, by and large, have not been swept up—not in the music industry, not

in the entertainment industry.

PLAYBOY: I want to get back to what you were saying earlier around the subject of Title IX. You were kind of acting out how the accused, the respondent, would ask questions like “Why did you kiss me like that if you didn't want to?” One of the things that became clear with the Kavanaugh case, and a lot of pundits said this afterward, was that both stories were credible. I believe Brett Kavanaugh didn't believe he did anything wrong. You were in



the actual room during the hearing, yes?

BURKE: Yes. Kavanaugh changed me. I was in the room during the testimony, and it still sits with me in some ways. I've never experienced anything like that. The reality that this was not just an investigation but was affecting the makeup of the Supreme Court of the United States—something about that just keeps resonating with me. It was the lack of accountability and the fact that we think only in terms of crime and punishment as opposed to harm and harm reduction. What would it have looked like if he had just said, “I drank a lot at 17. I might have even had a drinking problem. And though I don't remember that day and those details, it doesn't sound

unlike something I would have engaged in at that time. I didn't have a real understanding of consent. It doesn't sound like something I would do now, and I've spent the past 40 years trying to be a different person than I was at 17. But I do want to be accountable for any harm I might have caused you at 17.”

PLAYBOY: That would have been amazing.

BURKE: It would have given her some closure and possibly some healing. It would have set an example for what ac-

countability can look like in retrospect. But nobody wants to be the first. I feel the same way about Bill Clinton and Hillary Clinton.

PLAYBOY: And I feel the same way about R. Kelly. What if, during his interview with Gayle King, he had said, “I need help.” What if his on-camera breakdown had been a real moment of contrition?

BURKE: We are forgiving people. We're a forgiving country. It would have set the stage so differently. With Kavanaugh, it would have shown leadership. In the case of R. Kelly, we're waiting for it. Black people are like, “Give me anything. Give me a reason.”

PLAYBOY: Even his survivors. I interviewed all but two of them, and none of them said they wanted him in prison.

BURKE: But that's the other misconception. There's actual research that shows survivors of sexual violence don't think punitively at first. People don't immediately say, “I want them to go to jail.” The

relationship between survivor and perpetrator is often complicated, whether it's a family member or a community member or some person in leadership, and we worry how it will affect larger swaths of people. If R. Kelly had said, “I got a problem; they're barely legal”—not even incriminate himself—“They're barely legal, but I know I need help.” Give us something.

Bill Clinton did that interview and got upset about the Monica Lewinsky questions, and then Hillary backed it up—even now. Yes, it was a consensual relationship, but she was 22 or 23, and you were 49 and the president. What would it have looked like for a former president of the United States to say, “I recognize that relationship

was an absolute abuse of power, and though it was consensual, I recognize that abuse of power creates an environment for sexual violence to happen”?

PLAYBOY: Bill Maher said on his show recently that the Dems need to stop apologizing. I thought that was, in his typical way, an incredibly reductive way to look at the possibilities of owning your shit.

BURKE: Yeah, because it’s more than an apology. It’s one thing to say, “I’m so sorry if anyone was offended.” It’s a different thing to take ownership and responsibility. The reality is that consent has always been the same.

PLAYBOY: What do you mean?

BURKE: I’m not talking about legally; I’m talking about morally and in personal relationships. The idea of needing consent to touch or to interact with somebody isn’t new, but the laws have changed around it. Our understanding of bodily autonomy and these kinds of things has grown over time. So the understanding of consent has changed, and I get that. People use the same argument for Cosby: “Oh, it was a different time. People used a little bit of drugs, and it was fine. Everybody did Quaaludes, and it was fine.” I’m like, “No, it wasn’t.” It may not have been against the law, though it probably was, but it was still wrong. Anytime you have somebody who’s incapacitated and can’t give consent, who doesn’t have the ability to say yes, it’s wrong. So consent is at the core of this. I want to talk about consent more, and I want to talk about it in the context of relationships and sex—and outside of them too. I think we have to examine the way we think about consent in our platonic, daily, normal relationships, because it influences other things. People touch people all the time—“Oh, I’m a hugger,” and they just go right in and start hugging me.

PLAYBOY: I had to tell someone, “It’s not ‘I’m a hugger.’ It’s ‘Do you hug?’” Brittney Cooper taught me that, because I was one of those people. It took only one time, and from then on I just said, “Do you hug?”

BURKE: “Do you hug?” I don’t care what you are. It’s so ridiculous to me. We need to have a different kind of consent education, and it’s not “Let’s teach a class on consent,” but “Let’s weave the idea of consent into everything we do.” We can shift that as a cultural norm. I’ve gotten into the practice now, even when I take pictures, of saying “Do you mind if I put my hands here?” or “Do you mind if I put my arms around you?”

PLAYBOY: How about “Do you mind if I post this?”

BURKE: Oh, that’s another one. That’s a big one. But I don’t like being touched. I never have. I have an aversion to touch from my history and all the rest of that. I’ve had to adjust, because people touch me all the time, which is such an oxymoron or irony or whatever. You love me because I talk about autonomy and consent.

PLAYBOY: And your own abuse.

BURKE: Right. But people don’t ask how that affects you. So when you take pictures, their hands slide down your back or they rub your shoulder. Don’t do that. Consent is largely about communication, and I think because people are so rigid in what they know, they can’t see another way. So affirmative consent becomes “Oh, this is unsexy. I’m not going to say ‘Can I insert my penis into your vagina?’” No. But there *is* a way to talk about it: I tell boys, “You want a woman to tell you that she wants you.” We also have to resocialize girls, because we’ve been socialized for eons to be coy and to play hard to get and all that, which leads into the sex-positivity thing. This is why narrative and narrative shift is so important. We have to tell different stories. We have to create new norms.

Going back to the part about race, I do think we have a special situation in communities of color and in the black community. Honestly, I think we won’t see a culture shift until we start with children. The push that should be happening is not for consent but for curriculums—culturally competent curriculums that also deal with sexual violence, sexuality, gender and all the rest. Start in kindergarten and then layer it on, year by year, so you’ll have children who have been learning about boundaries, respect and gender norms from a young age, and it’s just ingrained in their minds. We won’t have a different society until we reeducate and resocialize, but that takes so many people being in agreement.

PLAYBOY: But it can also happen with a few, and it can happen where we are.

BURKE: When people ask me about restorative justice or transformative justice, I say we have to have both. Imagine a world that has these ideas about consent, that has a new dynamic around justice, while figuring out what safety looks like for us right now. We’re figuring out what justice and accountability look like in the short term, but we don’t just have to imagine that world; we have to put it in practice in small ways and wherever we have some control, in our institutions, in our communities. Create models that can be replicated, that we can grow from. It’s one thing to sit in a

conference and talk about restorative justice and transformative justice and how this doesn’t work and we need something new, and it’s another thing to take that imagination and put it into practice so people can see that these things work.

I keep saying we need five to 10 years. This is an idea—I don’t know how well it works or doesn’t work. I’ve seen it work on a small scale. I feel it can work on a larger scale, but we need time and space. We have to try something different. We have to take away the noise about the perpetrators and the this and the that and focus on the people who have already suffered, who are already dealing with sexual violence, already holding this trauma, and the action it’s going to take to keep more people from doing that. Our work is about healing and action. That’s really it. All this other stuff about who’s getting taken down, the gender war and *blah, blah, blah*—it’s all noise. It takes away from this cultural work we have to do on the ground.

So you have the millions and millions of people who said “Me too,” and folks forget about them. We wouldn’t be here if not for the labor of survivors, people who labor to tell their stories, who labor to come forward, however hard that is. So that happens, and it builds this huge whatever it is we’re in, and then folks immediately pivot away from that, as opposed to saying, “My God, this is a moment for us to examine culture, to look at what’s happening around us.” How did we get to the place where in the span of 24 hours you can have millions of people around the world all agree that their lives have been affected by this one thing? I always use the example of disease: If tomorrow we woke up and 12 million people said, “I also have this disease,” and it just spread like wildfire and more people every day kept saying, “I have it now,” imagine if our response was “Well, shit, how are we going to date now in this age of this new disease?” Or “I’m not taking meetings with that disease.” It’s ridiculous. We create all this distraction instead of dealing with the heart of the matter.

There are three questions: How the fuck did we get here? We know lots of people can answer that question about rape culture and misogyny and patriarchy. How do we stop it? Because, my God, these numbers are awful. And then, for the future, how do we make sure we move forward in a way that gets us as far away from this as possible? That’s our work, period.

PLAYBOY: That’s amazing.

BURKE: Anything else is not worth even talking about. ■

*We wouldn't
be here if not
for the people
who labor to
come forward,
however hard
that is.*



WASTELAND



PHOTOGRAPHY BY
JANE HU

Joséphine Wister Faure's *Levitation* speaks to the paradoxical relationship between beauty and decay that characterizes the Salton Sea and the art created there.

WONDERLAND



How three renegade curators are building an ethereal world of weirdness on the shores of a man-made lake in a scrappy pocket of the California desert

BY **ADAM SKOLNICK**

A

s the sun sweeps its western arc over the Salton Sea, toward the distant desert mountains, a prism appears on the cottony clouds, a rainbow rabbit hole in the sky. Just by looking up, we all drop in.

We are participants and spectators at the 2019 Bombay Beach Biennale, an underground art party that some call the new (or anti) Burning Man. (Despite the name, it has been held annually since 2016, this year over a weekend in late March.) In the next 40 hours I, along with roughly 500 invited guests, will stroll through an atheist church, watch a sleeping woman levitate four feet above her bed and see a world-class prima ballerina, flown in from Berlin, dance at a trailer-park opera house. I will glimpse half-naked hipsters smeared with vibrant colors frolic in the cold desert wind, and eavesdrop on middle-aged locals with the sunken faces of chemical dependency. I will be approached by a penniless stranger desperate to borrow a toothbrush, and I'll gawk at dinosaur bones and crystals nestled within the cracked shell of an old mobile home marinating in deep house music and starlight. Through it all I will wonder if art is enough to shift the fortunes of this small, hobbled town—and if the locals believe the art-as-salvation promise in the first place.

As the sky darkens on the first day, I retreat toward the berm that overlooks the one-square-mile dirt-road grid that is Bombay Beach, California. At first glance it looks like a postapocalyptic trailer park. Although the town has hundreds of properties, many of the modular homes are crumbling and only about 300 people live here, with a median household income of less than \$14,000 a year. Twenty miles from the nearest gas station or supermarket and an hour southeast of booming Palm Springs, Bombay Beach is a town where reliable work is scarce and meth addiction widespread, where both the sea and the air are feared to be toxic. A handful of retirees subsist on fixed incomes, and other residents survive without water or power—which means no air-conditioning or fans in the brutal summers, when temperatures can reach 120 degrees.

And yet it is here that three wealthy, well-connected friends have

launched a radical experiment in art, culture and regeneration. In the process, they're raising significant questions about a community on the precipice of change: Namely, is Bombay Beach becoming just another elitist playground, or is something deeper happening in this desert town built on the cracked foundation of a mistake?

...

In 1905 the Imperial Canal, which brought Colorado River water to farms in the southern California desert, breached. By the time the engineers completed their fix, in 1907, they'd accidentally created the largest lake in California. It was named the Salton Sea.

Beginning in 1959, celebrities including Jerry Lewis, Frank Sinatra and the Beach Boys water-skied and partied in the area. The lake was stocked with fish to lure anglers and vacationers, who built second homes along the shore—then a 1981 flood destroyed the local yacht club. A spike in the lake's salinity, combined with toxic algae blooms caused by agricultural runoff, resulted in a biblical fish kill. Dead tilapia by the thousands washed up onshore (and still do), their bones degrading in huge drifts. It didn't take long for the tourist economy and the town itself to wither.

In 2007, Tao Ruspoli, a photographer and filmmaker with royal Roman bloodlines, opened a Kim Stringfellow photography book and saw pictures of the Salton Sea for the first time. Within



Left: Highlights of the year-round Bombay Beach Drive-In include muscle-car seating and French cinema. **Top:** Olivia Steele's fiery *I Still Love You* installation lit up the lake at dusk and dawn each day of the Biennale.





Right: In 1944, B-29 pilots training for Hiroshima dropped a 10,000-pound payload onto targets in the Salton Sea. Local legend has it that one dummy bomb landed onshore—hence the name of the town, and of artist Joe Regan’s *Bomb Bay Shelter*.

When exhibited
in a place
where poverty
and beauty,
desecration
and promise
collide, art
is elevated.



Above: A performer heats up the big-top tent during Toledo Diamond’s sexy spoken-word performance on opening night of the 2019 Biennale. The show christened a new circus-themed venue called Showtown.



Below: Kenny Scharf’s signature Day-Glo masterpieces—constructed from salvaged trash and plastic toys—reflect the pop artist’s long-standing concern for the environment. He describes *Bombay Boom!* as his famous *Cosmic Cavern* installation “turned inside out.”



Left: Randy Polumbo’s five-story *Lodestar* serves as a watchtower; visitors can climb the fuselage for 360-degree views of raw desert that from on high looks like the surface of a strange planet.

days he was in Bombay Beach. “It looked like this dark underbelly of the American dream,” Ruspoli says. “I was married at the time, and I said to my wife, ‘We could buy a house in Bombay Beach for the price of a used Jetta.’” His wife (the actress Olivia Wilde, whom he’d married in 2003) didn’t bite, but when they divorced in 2011, his first move was to buy property in the area. He started spending weekends by the lake, and in 2015 he brought Stefan Ashkenazy to town.

Part carnival barker, part hospitality impresario, Ashkenazy owns the Petit Ermitage boutique hotel in West Hollywood. In 2015 he had plans to host a pop-up hotel experience in Joshua Tree, but when he arrived in Bombay Beach, he torched those plans on the spot—despite the smell, the dead fish, the flies and all the other things he’d been warned about. “The idea transformed from communing with nature to commiserating with it,” Ashkenazy says. He and Ruspoli seized on the idea of bringing high-caliber art, ballet and even opera to a town in tatters.

They called in another friend, Lily Johnson White, an heir to the Johnson & Johnson fortune. White sits on the board of Creative Time, a nonprofit that funds and produces ambitious public art projects. “I really wanted to focus on bringing emerging or established artists out and see how they reacted to the space, and how they would create work that was in dialogue with the town and the community,” White says.

Together, in April 2016, they launched what they call “year zero” of the Biennale. The event was modest. Ashkenazy called in artist Greg Haberny to create an installation out of one of the few properties he owned at the time. Haberny was urged to purchase a junk plane and



Above: The Biennale's culmination: a surreal sunrise opera performance by Ariana Vafadari.

Right: Stephanie Cate's *Toxic Tea for Two* is a reminder of the lake's continuing decline despite more than 15 years of environmental legislation and restoration efforts. **Below:** Neon-light wizard Olivia Steele's *Paradise, Abandoned*, housed in a crumbling waterfront shack, reflects a weekend (and a town) of paradoxes.

Opposite: Kirk Kunihiro and Huy Ngoc-Quang Tran's *Discard*, a (functional) trash receptacle inspired by regeneration.







Top: Artist Greg Haberny (left) and the event's organizers, including Tao Ruspoli (above), hope the arts community will bring attention to local social and environmental issues. **Left:** Foundation Foundation is the Biennale's first permanent addition to the town of Bombay Beach.



Above: Vera Sola, a haunting, velvet-voiced folksinger-songwriter (and daughter of Dan Aykroyd), jams with her band through a paneless window frame on Saturday night. **Opposite:** A flexing *luchador* and hipsters in party dresses crunched across the smelly, bone-carpeted beach to preen on *The Water Ain't That Bad, It's Just Salty*—a submerged steel swing constructed by Chris "Ssippi" Wessman and Damon James Duke.

stage some sort of crash, but the artist—a former soap actor who had gone from the set of *One Life to Live* to a life of struggle making art in New York and Baltimore—opted to rebuild.

"I didn't want to add more carnage to the landscape," Haberny says. In his hands, the building, which was filled with nesting birds, fist-size spiders and scorpions when he arrived, became Foundation Foundation, Bombay Beach's first art museum, which now hosts residencies for willing artists.

In 2017, more properties were purchased and transformed, and White recruited legendary street artist Kenny Scharf. To create his installation, Scharf piled the roof of a crumbling home with plastic junk he'd collected from the streets of L.A. and swirled the walls and windows with his signature fluorescent monsters.

Ruspoli estimates some 30 artists now own more than 50 properties in town. They're still a minority, but they are a force, in part because of the stunning public works they leave behind—Steve Shigley's metallic cubes, Olivia Steele's neon-light installations, Randy Polumbo's masterwork *Lodestar*, a 47-foot-high sculpture carved out of a World War II jet purchased on Craigslist.

But Ruspoli and company weren't the first artists to set up shop here: Predating the festival by three years is the Bombay Beach Arts & Culture Center, run by Dave Day, who has owned property and lived at least part-time in the town for the past 22 years. An artist in his own right, Day has long been inspired by the Japanese ceramics process *kintsugi*, in which a broken pot is bonded with silver or gold. "In the process of being broken and then put back together," he says, "it becomes something more."

Under his watch, the center hosts Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and offers public showers and free breakfasts to impoverished residents. Day also houses artists who spend part of the year working in town and generally serves as a bridge between both worlds. When I ask him if the art movement in Bombay Beach has helped the town, he pauses and smiles.

"We'll see," he says. "The jury is still out." The community is primarily white retirees, with fluctuating populations of other demographics, but meth doesn't discriminate: "It goes along with people dealing with boredom and hopelessness."

...

When the first Biennale launched, local opposition was widespread. According to Day, area retirees weren't fond of the hedonistic displays that came with it—the scantily clad attendees, the all-night psychedelic dance parties.

"It could have been a good thing if they'd come into the town and been respectful to the people who live here," says Gloria Town, a year-round resident and active community member. "But they feel entitled to do whatever they want."

That sentiment has mellowed somewhat. "It's probably 50-50 pro and con," says James Andrews, another permanent resident. "I love it because it's only a week or two out of the year, and it brings a little life to the beach. It definitely helps the local economy."

Some locals and members of the artist community hang out socially, both during and beyond Biennale season. The latter also patronize the Ski Inn, the town's sole watering hole, and attend community board meetings. Day adds, "The event organizers are seeing the benefit of meeting and addressing the needs of the community rather than just being a big fiesta for family and friends and the artists—something we've been stressing and working on since it started." In the days following the 2019 Biennale, organizers take steps to fund a waste-management pilot program and install solar streetlights. But as the town's fortunes rise, there are other costs to consider.

Nowhere are the potential implications of growth more acutely



rendered than in an installation by an artist known as Jae Fella, who created signs for Sotheby's International Reality [sic] and placed them on several properties in town. He also built a fake real estate office and, in its window, posted listings for multimillion-dollar properties that had been worth \$500 just two years earlier. The fact that some property values have risen to more than \$30,000 suggests life is already imitating art. Ashkenazy plans to open a hotel in town called the Last Resort. If Bombay Beach gentrifies further, where will that leave its current residents?

"If I were to have a personal goal, it would be to see artists, who were never able to afford real estate, move here, reside and create, live and die," Day says. "If it gets to where the people with the most money buy the most lots all at once and build big campuses, then it makes it a little more challenging."

• • •

Among the 500 or so people who have flocked to this year's Biennale, those questions are for another time.

The event peaks on Saturday night, unfurling like a choose-your-own art adventure. A marching band and two stilted dancers dressed like a bride and groom on their way to a funeral lead a sunset parade. Blissed-out bohemians pack a bandstand to enjoy a stunning ballet performance at the Opera House, and a line of people wait to glimpse Haberny's abstract paintings and wood collages—their own form of *kintsugi*—at Foundation. To create the pieces, he bought back his previously sold work, chopped up the canvases, burned them to ash and used it as paint.

Eventually everyone spills into the Estates, Ashkenazy's derelict property, where acclaimed KCRW DJ Jeremy Sole's eclectic, genre-bending grooves bounce off graffitied cinder-block walls.

I roam the galleries, get down on my knees to look a triceratops in the eye and stand tall to measure myself against amethyst boulders cracked wide open. I mingle and dance among revelers in colorful galleries festooned with toilet bowl brushes.

All the while, I can't help but believe that perhaps art *is* the great antidote after all—not just for this town but for what ails people everywhere. We may not live by a toxic lake, but we consume way too much plastic and industrial food. Our trash is collected for us, but it piles up somewhere. The gears of our existence run smoothly and feel antiseptic, but nothing is. We're deluged with advertising and curated content to the point of anxious distraction. Art, on the other hand, exists only in a specific time and space. It's three-dimensional and real, fashioned from raw or found materials and creative force. And when it's exhibited in a place like Bombay Beach, where poverty and beauty, desecration and promise collide, that art, and the charge it delivers, is elevated.

At sunrise, French-Iranian opera singer Ariana Vafadari performs on the beach with a small band for the night's survivors. They wear angel wings or faux fur or are dressed like desert gypsies. Colorful smoke grenades are set off behind the virtuoso mezzo-soprano as she sings her Zoroastrian songs of praise. The sky blushes pink. There is beauty and there is reverence.

Bombay Beach has become a wonderland. ■

FACES OF



PHOTOGRAPHY BY RYAN PFLUGER

RESILIENCE

ON THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE STONEWALL RIOTS, WE JOIN THE TREVOR PROJECT TO CELEBRATE HOW FAR WE'VE COME—AND RAISE AWARENESS OF THE WORK THAT STILL NEEDS TO BE DONE TO SECURE EQUALITY FOR ALL

BY NICO LANG

Fifty years ago, Larry Littlejohn wrote a letter to *PLAYBOY* condemning a method of treatment intended to “cure” homosexuality. Littlejohn, who served as president of San Francisco’s Society for Individual Rights, described the case of a 22-year-old patient “treated for transvestism” through aversion techniques. After showing the patient photos of himself dressed in women’s clothing, Littlejohn claimed, doctors injected the individual with apomorphine. Sometimes used to treat Parkinson’s disease, the drug also induces “headaches, nausea and vomiting.”

“It had been planned to put him through 72 ‘trials,’” Littlejohn wrote, “but the last four had to be abandoned because he became irritable, confused and hostile; developed rigors, high temperature and high blood pressure; suffered from impaired coordination and was unable to maintain a normal conversation.”

Although doctors had declared the patient “cured” of his condition, Littlejohn noted that another person subjected to electroshock therapy, this time as treatment to cure homosexuality, “wept for half an hour after each session.” He eventually refused further sessions after “rushing out of the room in tears.”

“I cannot see where this form of treatment differs from the tortures of the Inquisition or the brainwashing of the Communists,” Littlejohn concluded.

His letter to the editor was published in March 1969—four months before the Stonewall riots, during which activists including Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera fought back against police brutality at gay bars in New York City’s West Village. But 50 years after the six-day protest kick-started what would become the modern LGBTQ movement, the treatment Littlejohn described remains legal in 34 states in this country. New York passed statewide legislation to ban the practice only in January.

Today such treatments are widely known as conversion therapy, though they’re sometimes referred to as “reparative therapy” or “orientation change.” The terms refer to a loosely associated range of practices including everything from shock

treatment and aversion therapy to waterboarding and ice baths. In the vast majority of cases, though, conversion therapy takes the form of talk therapy wherein LGBTQ individuals meet with a counselor or pastor who teaches them that who they are is “sick” and “wrong.”

At the time of Littlejohn’s letter, homosexuality was considered a “mental illness”; since then, the American Medical Association and other organizations have evolved. In its *Journal of Ethics*, the AMA has condemned conversion therapy as harmful and ineffective, claiming it leads to depression, anxiety and increased risk of suicidal ideation. Despite such cautionary assessments, an estimated 700,000 people in the United States have been subjected to the practice. Without decisive action, in the coming years thousands more LGBTQ youth will join the ranks of (often traumatized) conversion-therapy survivors.

To honor the decades of advocacy against conversion therapy, *PLAYBOY* partnered with the Trevor Project—a national LGBTQ youth suicide-prevention organization and architect of the “50 Bills 50 States” campaign to ban conversion therapy nationwide. On the following pages we spotlight and celebrate six activists and survivors who are raising awareness of its impact.

Their stories, each representative of a different experience with conversion therapy and presented alongside stunning portraits by queer photographer Ryan Pfluger, are a reminder of what Franklin E. Kameny, co-founder and president of the Mattachine Society of Washington, D.C., wrote in *PLAYBOY* five decades ago. (His letter to the editor ran alongside Littlejohn’s in response to April 1967 and August 1968 *Playboy Forum* comments made by behavioral researchers Gerald Davison and David Barlow, who believed it was possible to recondition “sexual deviation.”) Kameny, whose organization was a branch of one of the first LGBTQ advocacy groups in the U.S., declared that homosexuality didn’t need to be cured.

“Gay is good,” he said.

These inspiring leaders are working to ensure society finally heeds that message.



the advocate

sam brinton

31, alexandria, virginia

Sam Brinton would be the first to admit they are an unlikely face of today's movement to ban conversion therapy. Brinton, who identifies as gender fluid and uses gender-neutral pronouns, received a master's degree in nuclear engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2013 and started a nonprofit devoted to clean-energy advocacy soon after. "My technical passion is solving nuclear waste and disarming nuclear bombs," they say. "I've been doing it for more than a decade."

But two years before graduation, Brinton took on a very different kind of advocacy. As a conversion-therapy survivor, they began lobbying states to ban the practice, which was still legal in all 50 states in 2011. California became the first state to outlaw orientation-change efforts affecting LGBTQ youth the following year.

While advocates and survivors have been fighting against conversion therapy for decades—through litigation and storytelling, and by persuading major medical and mental health organizations to cease treating a person's sexual orientation or gender identity as a pathology—recent years have seen the practice achieve unprecedented levels of public attention and legislative progress. Today's advocacy landscape, Brinton notes, is practically unrecognizable in comparison with that of just eight years ago.

In 2019, the top Google search results for "conversion therapy" are resource guides and info sheets from LGBTQ organizations including the Trevor Project and Born Perfect, an initiative founded by the National Center for Lesbian Rights. But in 2011, Brinton says, the top 10 or 20 entries on Google were for conversion-therapy providers seeking patients. At the time,

the LGBTQ movement was largely focused on marriage equality, so it was "hard to find anyone who would listen."

"Most people didn't think conversion therapy was still happening, and most people didn't think it was worthy of attention," Brinton explains, adding that advocacy efforts in 2011 focused on "trying to find someone who cared." But by 2017, the movement to ban conversion therapy had gained enough momentum that Brinton left nuclear engineering to work as the head of advocacy and government affairs for the Trevor Project. Advances since then have been significant. When Brinton brought the 50 Bills 50 States project to the LGBTQ youth organization two years ago, just five states—California, New Jersey, Oregon, Illinois and Vermont—had taken action to outlaw orientation-change efforts. Four states moved to ban conversion therapy in 2017, and five followed suit in 2018.

At press time, two states—New York and Massachusetts—had taken action this year to protect LGBTQ youth from "gay cure" treatments, and two more may soon join them. Colorado, led by Jared Polis, the country's first openly gay governor, is expected to enact a ban this year, and Maine governor Janet Mills has pledged her support for a conversion-therapy ban should legislation reach her desk.

Brinton credits that progress to the tireless advocacy of conversion-therapy survivors. But according to Brinton, misconceptions about the treatment persist.

"So many people think that because this is being done by a licensed therapist, it's effective and it works," they say. "Every major medical association and organization has come out against conversion therapy, and yet there's this pervasive idea that because the person who is doing it has the word *doctor* before their name, this must be good."

Brinton, who was subjected to shock therapy at the age of 11, won't be satisfied until conversion therapy is treated the same as smoking. "The Surgeon General has a warning on every pack of cigarettes," they say. "I want every single person across the country to know how bad conversion therapy is for their health."

In the meantime, Brinton keeps, above their desk, a memento of how far the movement has come. In 2015, when President Barack Obama came out against conversion therapy, it was reported above the fold of *The New York Times*—marking the first time a sitting president condemned the practice. Since then, Brinton has begun collecting pens from all the governors—seven Republicans and nine Democrats—who have signed conversion-therapy bans.

Brinton is hoping to add 34 more someday. If the past eight years are any indication, it may be sooner than anyone could have imagined.

Dusty Ray Bottoms prayed for a change. He just didn't know what needed to change. He was 20 years old and home on spring break from Wright State, a small university outside Dayton, Ohio built on land donated by the nearby Air Force base. Bottoms didn't fit in with his classmates in the theater program, and his home life wasn't any easier. The son and grandson of evangelical pastors, he grew up in what he calls a "conservative, God-fearing household."

Bottoms was essentially living three lives: There was the person his parents wanted him to be, the person his peers wanted him to be, and the hollow space where he hoped to one day carve out his own identity. He cried out to God to come and fill the space. "I can't do this anymore," he said. "I need something to happen."

The very next morning Bottoms got his wish. His mother called him down to the kitchen, saying his father had discovered something on his computer. To this day, he still doesn't know what it was his father found, but as he crossed the threshold into the living room, he already knew what they were about to say. Bottoms came out to them, the private longings and fears left unspoken for years suddenly pouring out like shattered glass.

"I was so terrified they were going to disown me and kick me out, but they did quite the opposite," he recalls. "They wanted to do anything they could to fix me. I was so depressed at the time that I would try anything to feel happy or to feel better."

At his parents' request, Bottoms agreed to be exorcised. At the age of 12, he had been sexually assaulted by a man who had pulled him underneath the stall in a mall bathroom. Although he'd lied and said he got away before the man hurt him, his parents remained convinced that he was "possessed by a gay demon." The church he grew up in taught that "if you have a sexual encounter with someone, you take on that person's spirit," he explains.

Bottoms compares his exorcism to a trip to the principal's office. The two-hour session was held in a conference room at a local church, where he was given a series of rules to follow. The facilitator, whom Bottoms calls a "prayer warrior," ordered him to keep both feet planted firmly on the floor and put his hands on the table in the center of the room, palms facing up. Bottoms was instructed to maintain eye contact with the prayer warrior

This isn't the first time Bottoms has told this story. He moved to New York City to pursue acting in 2010 and began doing drag after seeing performances by local artists Bob the Drag Queen and Thorgy Thor. Their shows gave him permission to be "different, weird and unique," he says. His stage name is a combination of his childhood nickname, Dusty Ray, and a playful taunt from fellow waiters at a serving job in the city. After performing for nearly a decade in New York bars and nightclubs, last year Bottoms competed on *RuPaul's Drag Race*, on which he opened up publicly for the first time about surviving conversion therapy.

Bottoms came out as a survivor because he hoped it would help others who had endured similar circumstances feel less alone. But now he just wants to prove he was never broken, never needed fixing in the first place. After the exorcism, he was forced to meet with church leaders for a series of exit interviews, and during the third and final session a pastor warned him against continuing down the path of a "homosexual lifestyle."

"You will never find true love," he recalls the man saying. "You will never find success. You will just have a life of misery."

Today Bottoms knows that isn't true. The popularity of *RuPaul's Drag Race* has given him a global fan base. He has starred in national ad campaigns. His one-woman show, *It's a Hard Dot Life*, is set to tour the United States. He's engaged to his partner of six years. "Everything they said I couldn't have," he says, "I have."

the celebrity

dusty ray bottoms

31, new york, new york

at all times and keep his mouth wide open so the demons could be released. Three people held him in place while his parents looked on—his father scarlet-faced, his mother crying.

"I had to list the names of all the people I ever had a sexual encounter with," he says. "I was nervous, so I made up names. They tried to get me to speak in tongues. I just remember the prayer warrior would tell me to say 'Hallelujah!' over and over and over and over again, really fast, and the tongues would come."





the survivor

peter nunn

33, norcross, georgia

When Peter Nunn was 15 years old, his parents told him he was going on a trip. What he didn't know was that they'd found a men's workout magazine he'd tucked away. At the time, Nunn didn't understand what he was feeling or what it meant to be gay. Homeschooled throughout his childhood, he was raised in a repressive fundamentalist faith that he compares to a cult. "Every aspect of your life was controlled," he says. Transgressing those strict dictates meant risking excommunication, both from the church and the entire community.

During a layover at the airport, his father explained that Nunn was headed to a "therapy center" where counselors were going to "fix" him. If Nunn didn't change, he says, his family planned to "get rid" of him.

"I wasn't prepared for this. I'd been a pretty happy kid, but really quickly—just in that one conversation—I realized everything was on the line for me: my family, my relationship with my parents, my security of having a home, but also my faith and my God were at risk. If I didn't get this fixed, then everything that was important to me in my life could be taken away."

Nunn spent two weeks receiving conversion-therapy treatment at a center in Sioux City, Iowa. He says the building looked like a small office complex that might have been built in the 1970s—a series of sparsely furnished rooms with chairs and desks filling the space as an afterthought. During sessions, counselors told him, he recalls, that "homosexuality is a sin, that God punishes gay people with AIDS, and that there's no way to be in a happy gay relationship." If he continued act-

ing on his attraction to men, they warned, he would die alone.

Although Nunn wanted to change, these sessions weren't the cure his parents had prayed for. Instead, he was left with depression and shame. At the age of 16, he attempted to take his own life.

Nunn survived that attempt, and he has continued surviving. In his early 20s, at the urging of a friend, he began seeing a psychologist, who helped him cope with the trauma he'd experienced. Even as he began dating men and slowly opening up to friends about his sexuality, the lessons he learned in conversion therapy festered.

"I didn't feel loved by my family, my friends or my God," he says.

Therapy helped him embrace the parts of himself he'd been taught to hate, but it also showed him that talking about his trauma could be transformative—both for himself and his community. In March, he testified in favor of House Bill 580, which seeks to ban conversion therapy in the state of Georgia. If the bill becomes law, therapists in the Peach State will be subject to "discipline by the appropriate licensing authority" if they're caught offering any treatment that seeks to "cure" the sexual orientation or gender identity of anyone under the age of 18.

By talking about his experiences, Nunn hopes to help ensure other LGBTQ youth don't have to suffer the hardships he did.

"If I can give hope to a kid or educate a parent who might not understand how dangerous this practice is and might reconsider sending their kid to conversion therapy," he says, "then it will have been worth it."

In many ways, Ralph Bruneau has been there from the beginning. When former California state senator Ted Lieu—now a U.S. representative—sought to introduce legislation banning conversion therapy in 2012, Equality California called Bruneau, a marriage and family therapist based in Los Angeles, to help craft the language. At the time, Bruneau was on the board of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, where he played a part in creating a certification process for LGBTQ-affirmative therapists.

As a gay man himself, Bruneau says, he leaped at the chance to help set a precedent for other states to pass legislation banning conversion therapy for LGBTQ youth.

“I don’t think there’s anybody in our LGBTQ world who doesn’t carry around injury and shame, whether they’ve been through conversion therapy or not,” says Bruneau, who specializes in trauma relief for both gay and straight patients. “It’s so pernicious and so pervasive that it haunts us through our lives. Conversion therapy is ground zero for that.”

Bruneau knows the weight of shame and how difficult it is to unload. He moved to New York City to pursue acting during the time of “free love” in the 1970s, when it felt as though “sex happened almost everywhere.” He struggled to reconcile the radical sexual liberation he experienced in the West Village with the nagging idea that maybe, just maybe, he could be straight if he tried hard enough. He attended group sessions at a Scientology center in Manhattan and attempted a practice known as aesthetic realism, which sought to balance an individual’s feminine and masculine energies.

Bruneau didn’t change, but the world around him did. When the HIV/AIDS epidemic swept through New York in the 1980s, he watched as his theater community was hit hard. Two men with whom he had long-term relationships both died. After he began volunteering at a hospice in the city, he quit acting to pursue his master’s (and later his Ph.D.) in clinical psychology.

“Every resource we had was being used to care for our loved ones, and I wanted to redirect my life in that direction,” he says. “I’ve been doing that ever since.”

His work as a clinician led him, eight years ago, to advocate against conversion therapy, and eventually Bruneau found an unexpected platform to raise awareness about the practice’s

harms. In 2017 he competed in International Mr. Leather, an annual contest held in Chicago that’s best described as Miss America meets Tom of Finland. Bruneau’s speech was about his “journey out of shame.”

“I had tried everything, and the thing that worked was to accept that I’m born perfect,” he now says.

Bruneau won the title, which made him the oldest IML winner in history. A friend often jokes that his victory was historic for another reason: “Nobody else ever won IML with a ‘save the children’ speech,” Bruneau says.

Bruneau spent the greater part of the following year traveling the world to represent IML. During his travels he raised funds for a National Center for Lesbian Rights campaign to ban conversion therapy. His goal was to raise “enough money to hire one staff member for one year.” He says he came close. According to Bruneau, most people he discussed the issue with weren’t even aware that orientation-change efforts were still legal in their country. At the national level, as few as three countries have outlawed conversion therapy.

Bruneau believes it’s his duty to use his platform, his profession and his expertise to fight for LGBTQ youth. He hopes others will join him.

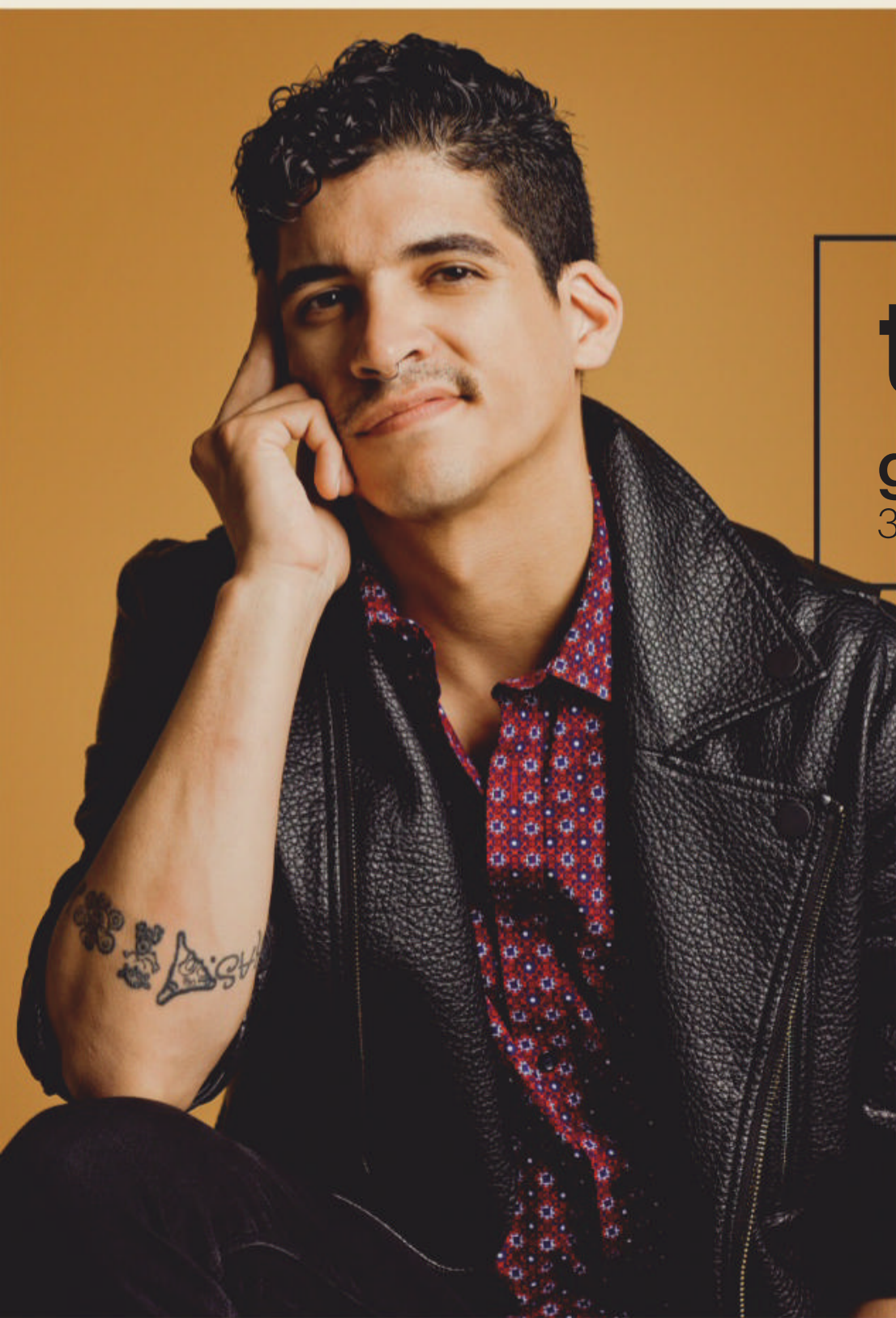
“Those of us who’ve dealt with shame our whole lives,” he says, “have an obligation to do what we can to make sure other generations of kids don’t feel the shame we felt.”

the therapist

ralph bruneau

66, los angeles, california





the faithful

gaby garcia-vera

30, washington, d.c.

“Did you hear?” Gaby Garcia-Vera asked his friends and family. “Isn’t this so amazing?”

It was March 27, 2019, and Puerto Rico governor Ricardo Rosselló had just signed an executive order protecting minors from the practice of conversion therapy. Although the order doesn’t outright ban the practice in the U.S. commonwealth, it does call on Puerto Rico’s health officials to take action, within 90 days, against therapy that promotes efforts to change sexual orientation.

From Washington, D.C., Garcia-Vera dialed everyone he knew who still lived on the island—his birthplace and home until the age of 18. A year and a half after Hurricane Maria left Puerto Rico with a death toll in the thousands, and thousands more without clean water or electricity, Garcia-Vera felt irrepressible joy that his community had something to celebrate.

“In the midst of all the horrible things that have happened, it made me proud to be Puerto Rican,” he tells *PLAYBOY*. “It was affirming. It made me feel seen.”

Garcia-Vera is among the 70 percent of Puerto Ricans who identify as Catholic. At the age of 11, he shared his sexual orientation for the first time—“I was part of one of the first generations of folks who came out really, really young,” he says. Some people in his personal life told him that those like him were “inherently bad.” There was something inside them that “needed to get fixed to be right with God.”

Garcia-Vera isn’t a survivor of conversion therapy, but after joining the Trevor Project’s youth advisory council in 2011, he began meeting LGBTQ youth who had been forced to attend

camps that promised to pray the gay away. He understood the trauma they experienced.

“I know the warm wash of being and feeling alone,” he says. “I know what it feels like for someone to single you out because of who you love. It is one of the most difficult things to overcome.”

Many practitioners of conversion therapy invoke scripture to legitimize their work. But Garcia-Vera’s Catholicism is precisely what feeds his passion to end the practice nationwide. Feeling shunned by a religious tradition that, he was told, viewed him as the living embodiment of sin, he left the Catholic Church as a teenager. It wasn’t until his mid-20s, as he questioned whether condemnation could truly represent God’s feelings toward LGBTQ people, that Garcia-Vera began to reconcile his faith with his sexual orientation.

“If we’re all made in God’s image, then you’re perfect the way you are—with all your imperfections,” he says. “Loving someone else inherently can’t be something that is imperfect.”

Today, Garcia-Vera works for a nonpartisan Catholic advocacy group in the nation’s capital. In his efforts to ban conversion therapy, he continues to see how morality can be “weaponized” against the LGBTQ community. While talking to a conservative politician in Florida who supported a bill that would allow adoption agencies to discriminate against same-sex couples, for example, Garcia-Vera says the lawmaker asserted that homosexuality is a personal choice.

Catholicism is showing some signs of evolution. In a 2014 Pew Research Center survey, seven out of 10 Catholics in the U.S. agreed that society should accept homosexuality, compared with 66 percent of mainline Protestants and 36 percent of evangelical Protestants. Though Pope Francis has been lauded for his more moderate views on homosexuality, he seemingly endorsed conversion therapy as recently as August 2018, saying that “a lot can be done through psychiatry.” The Vatican backtracked on those remarks, but the pontiff outlined a similar sentiment in April, when he advised parents of LGBTQ youth to “please consult and go to a professional” if they are “seeing rare things” in their children.

As Catholic leaders and conservative lawmakers refuse to modernize their views, Garcia-Vera remains optimistic that one day our leaders, both elected and religious, will realize the responsibility they have to those “they represent—to both do better and be better.”

“Who and how we love isn’t something that is up for question,” he says. “We know exactly who we are. We deserve better.”

Veronica Kennedy remembers exactly where she was when she found out Matthew Shepard had been murdered. Then just 18, Kennedy was living with her parents while she attended Northern Virginia Community College in Annandale. She had come home between classes to eat lunch and furiously type up a paper she'd waited until the last minute to start writing. Her family had a television in the basement, and when she looked up, she saw Shepard's face. He was killed in October 1998 by two men, Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson, who beat him and left him tied to a fence to die.

Kennedy didn't know him as Matthew Shepard. She knew him as Matt, a theater nerd with a "goose-honk laugh" who frequently showed up to class with a rumpled shirt when he missed laundry day on Mondays. The two had attended the American School in Switzerland, where their classmates included the "children of civil servants and military brats, along with Saudi princes, celebrities' kids and rich businessmen's children." They were dorm mates and had German class together.

Kennedy, who was just entering her freshman year when Shepard was a senior, is still reluctant to discuss his death. She describes the horror of seeing him become a national symbol of anti-gay hate crimes as the "end of innocence."

"I didn't talk about it for a long time, but what I did do was become very vocal as an advocate," she says. "I came out."

Kennedy describes herself as "bisexual, a polyglot and a giant nerd." But she is "a mother first and foremost," which she says gave her a new perspective on the violence and stigma LGBTQ people face just because of who they are. Around the time she gave birth to her son, Elias, and after meeting Sam Brinton and learning about the 50 Bills 50 States campaign, Kennedy began to research conversion therapy. As the mother of a little boy who is "black, Irish and Colombian," the prospect of anyone trying to force him to be someone he isn't horrifies her.

"It's as ludicrous as me saying I'm going to change my kid from straight to gay," Kennedy says. "If Elias comes to me one day and says, 'Mom, I'm straight,' what am I going to do—send him off to try and make him gay? How goofy does that sound?"

Her experience as both a mother and a teenage friend of Matthew Shepard has given her a unique voice with which to advocate against orientation change. The only cisgender female member of the Washington, D.C. chapter of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, she frequents gay bars in the metro area in gothic nun regalia to advocate for HIV/AIDS awareness. But Kennedy says her role in the drag activist troupe has evolved: She often broaches the subject of conversion therapy with the people she meets, many of whom are survivors.

One interaction sticks out to her. When she was five months pregnant, Kennedy rode with her fellow sisters in the 2015 Pride parade, the punishing humidity of summer in D.C. compounded by the group's signature costumery. As they prepared to board the float, a drag queen approached her and noticed she was expecting. "Love that baby regardless of how he turns out," he told her. "I am who I am right now because I had to stand up for myself and my parents wouldn't."

The two never spoke again after that day, and Kennedy will probably never know exactly what that stranger went through. But having witnessed the brutal cost of homophobia, she told the drag queen exactly what she would one day tell her son. "You are fantastic and you are beautiful," she said. "You are perfection, sweetheart."

the parent

veronica kennedy

39, annandale, virginia





REBEL EROTICA

Having stunned the art world with her meteoric rise, Helen Beard is out to challenge our deepest assumptions about what sexuality should look like

BY HOLLY BLACK

Helen Beard loves sex.

“Sex is a fundamental; it’s something everyone gets up to,” she says, surrounded by her work—a painted orgy of yellow phal-luses, pink labia and purple breasts. On display in her studio on the semi-industrial outskirts of Brighton, England, Beard’s paintings float between the realms of abstraction and figuration. It can take a minute to identify the large-scale curves, folds and orifices, especially in a world where humans are becoming accustomed to digesting visual culture on minuscule screens. But spend enough time with Beard’s work—at one of her rare London exhibitions or on Instagram (@helenbeardart)—and you’ll find a depiction of sex that, unlike the sanitized and chauvinistic embraces so common in traditional figurative art, insists on an equal distribution of pleasure.

“I like the power it gives the female form,” the 47-year-old artist says of her approach. “It’s not hiding behind anything. When you see it that big, you can’t avoid that it’s a vagina.”

...

Beard started using pornography as source material long before it became ubiquitous.

“I’m after that explosion, so I put colors together that will resonate and cause friction, like the feelings you get from the act of sex itself.”

“I used to go and buy top-shelf magazines,” she says. “I would travel Europe to get the more hardcore ones. But then the internet arrived.” Building a collection of porn thus began as a necessity—“You can’t just ask your friends to send pictures of them having sex”—but she has always taken care to avoid sexual imagery defined by unrealistic depictions of the female body. “So often it’s skinny women and muscly men,” she says. “I want a rounded view of the world, with lots of different people in it.”

That impulse is abundantly clear in *The Song of Self*, a new work created exclusively for PLAYBOY. Here, female affirmation is front and center. A green band suggests folds of stomach flesh, while the figure’s breasts appear realistically pendulous. “She’s natural, slouchy and pleasuring herself,” Beard explains. “It’s about body positivity. Women have sexual needs and can get pleasure that doesn’t have to come from penetrative sex. Quite often, in porn particularly, it’s all about men’s gratification.”

It’s the antithesis of the airbrushed, unattainable bodies that still dominate the media—and that, admittedly, have appeared on countless pages of this magazine. Yes, it would be careless not to recognize PLAYBOY’s contribution to the skewed male gaze on pleasure, and Beard is happy to discuss the tensions that might arise from this collaboration.

“I was a bit worried when I first got the call, because I am a feminist. I didn’t know if it was the right standpoint to be coming from,” she says. “I garnered a lot of opinions and ultimately determined that it’s great that PLAYBOY is reaching out to female writers and artists. It would be foolish to say no when women are finally getting their say. If you want to change public opinion, you need to do it within the realm of a lot of different audiences.”

...

Creating confrontational and widely viewed work wasn’t always Beard’s goal. For years, the Birmingham-born artist painted explicit images of humans pleasuring one another as a sidebar to her day job as a stylist and art director in the film industry. The notion that anyone other than her close friends or family would see her work was unfathomable—until Damien Hirst came along.

In 2016, when rail strikes brought London-bound commuter trains to a standstill, Beard’s husband, who worked as Hirst’s creative director, was forced to set up shop in his wife’s studio. During a Snapchat exchange with his boss concerning Halloween preparations, he sent a photo of his costume. Hirst was enamored of the Technicolor canvases in the background.

The notorious Young British Artist and entrepreneur had to have Beard’s *Blue Valentine*, an ostensibly abstract piece that camouflages a phallus penetrating an orifice. From there, Hirst pushed Beard to produce a series of larger paintings to be displayed at his Newport Street Gallery in South London as part of the 2018 *True Colours* group exhibition. Understandably, it was all a little daunting.

“I had a bit of a wobble the night before the opening. I e-mailed Damien and said, ‘I don’t know if I want anyone to ever see these paintings. I just want to stay in Brighton, quietly painting them on my own!’ But he said, ‘Don’t worry, everyone is going to love them.’”

Hirst’s prediction proved true. Since the exhibit’s opening, Beard has been inundated with requests for her work, including several commissions from Philip Niarchos, one of the world’s most influential collectors. The abrupt rise in demand has created stress, but Beard sees it as an opportunity to keep shining a light on underrepresented bodies. Although she began her art career painting heterosexual couples, informed by her own experiences, Beard has expanded her perspective to queer intimacy, inspired by the sexual fluidity embraced by younger generations, including her teenage children and their friends.

“I love that the world is going that way,” she says. “I’m diversifying to include all kinds of sex. It’s really important to portray everything.”

...

The vibrant and inclusive sexuality of Beard’s pieces is mirrored in the intuitive playfulness of her process. Although her canvases are full of solid planes of color, the brushwork, fine yet rigid, adds a texture that mimics the ripples of the body. Originally she was seduced by the flat finish of acrylic paint—thanks in part to her heroes Michael Craig-Martin and Patrick Caulfield—but she hit her stride with oils. “It does feel much more intimate,” she says, “because it’s like the fingers stroking the skin.”

During her 15-year career in film, Beard absorbed how cinematographers frame their shots. Intuition, as opposed to color theory, began to guide her palette selection.

“I have read the theory, but I try not to be dictated by it,” she says. “I’m after that explosion, so I put colors together that will resonate and cause friction, like the feelings you get from the act of sex itself.”

The artist is also keen to point out that though she references



Clockwise from top left: *What Women Want; Sidesaddle; Temporarily Banishing Isolation; The Big Dipper.*





Right: *Can We Conceive of Humanity
If It Did Not Know the Flower?*
Opposite page, from top:
Each Peach Pear Plum; Cyssan.



source material, her forms are embellished and reimagined. She swaps familiar, voyeuristic cinematic tropes for more intimate ones that compel the viewer to be an involved sexual player. Sometimes ideas come from unlikely places: Recent scientific discoveries concerning the size and shape of the clitoris inspired a group of paintings reminiscent of Henri Matisse's "cut-outs." Her 2017 piece *Beastie Boy*, which features a phallus decorated in what appears to be zebra print, is a work of striking serendipity: "I had been working for years on this painting, but something was missing," she says. "At some point I was listening to the radio and they announced that Adam Yauch from the Beastie Boys had died. I absolutely love them and I was so sad, so I suddenly thought, He's a beastie boy! I'm going to give him a zebra cock! That was my divine inspiration."

She goes on to mention that the years-long process behind *Beastie Boy* is nothing compared with the decades-long gestation of a piece she conceived as a teenager living in London. She was moved to acquire approximately 3,000 dildos from a Chinese manufacturer after seeing sex toys in the West End. "I just thought they were so nail-like," she explains. "I wanted to

make a bed of nails, but I never got around to doing it. I've had them stored in my loft, knowing I'd make a sculpture from them eventually. And now it is finally happening."

• • •

Helen Beard is an art-world curveball. She is never in danger of over-conceptualizing her work (obfuscation is an anxious badge of honor for many emerging artists), she has no gallery representation, and perhaps most significantly, she has achieved the rare feat of gaining recognition following a break from work to start a family.

Beard still seems slightly stunned by her success. "It's not what women expect, because they always think their career might have to go on the back burner if they have children."

The massive disparities in terms of acknowledgement, critical success and sale prices (women still fetch a fraction of the figures achieved by male artists at auction) mean that Beard's triumph is the exception, not the rule. The reality remains that female artists still face disproportionate challenges if they decide to have children—particularly if they elect, or need, to take time away from their practice. Beard recalls spending



years contemplating how she would re-enter a world so fixated on the next young and trendy creator. “I felt like they might actually be making work that was the same as mine, but the difference was that no one would ever see me,” she says. “It could have easily stayed that way. Women need to be talking about these experiences, but it’s so hard to come back. Too often these voices aren’t being heard.”

It’s very much to the art world’s benefit that Beard, like the big, brilliant bodies in her paintings, isn’t hiding behind anything. ■





A woman with dark hair and red lipstick is posing on a rooftop. She is wearing a grey, sparkly, two-piece bikini. She is holding a large, silver boombox behind her head with both hands. The boombox has a large speaker on the left with a lightning bolt logo. She has several tattoos: "more fat" on her upper left chest, a heart rate line on her lower left chest, and a skull with a cross on her left forearm. The background shows a city skyline with various buildings under a clear sky. The overall mood is retro and urban.

HEAT RISES

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
ANA DIAS



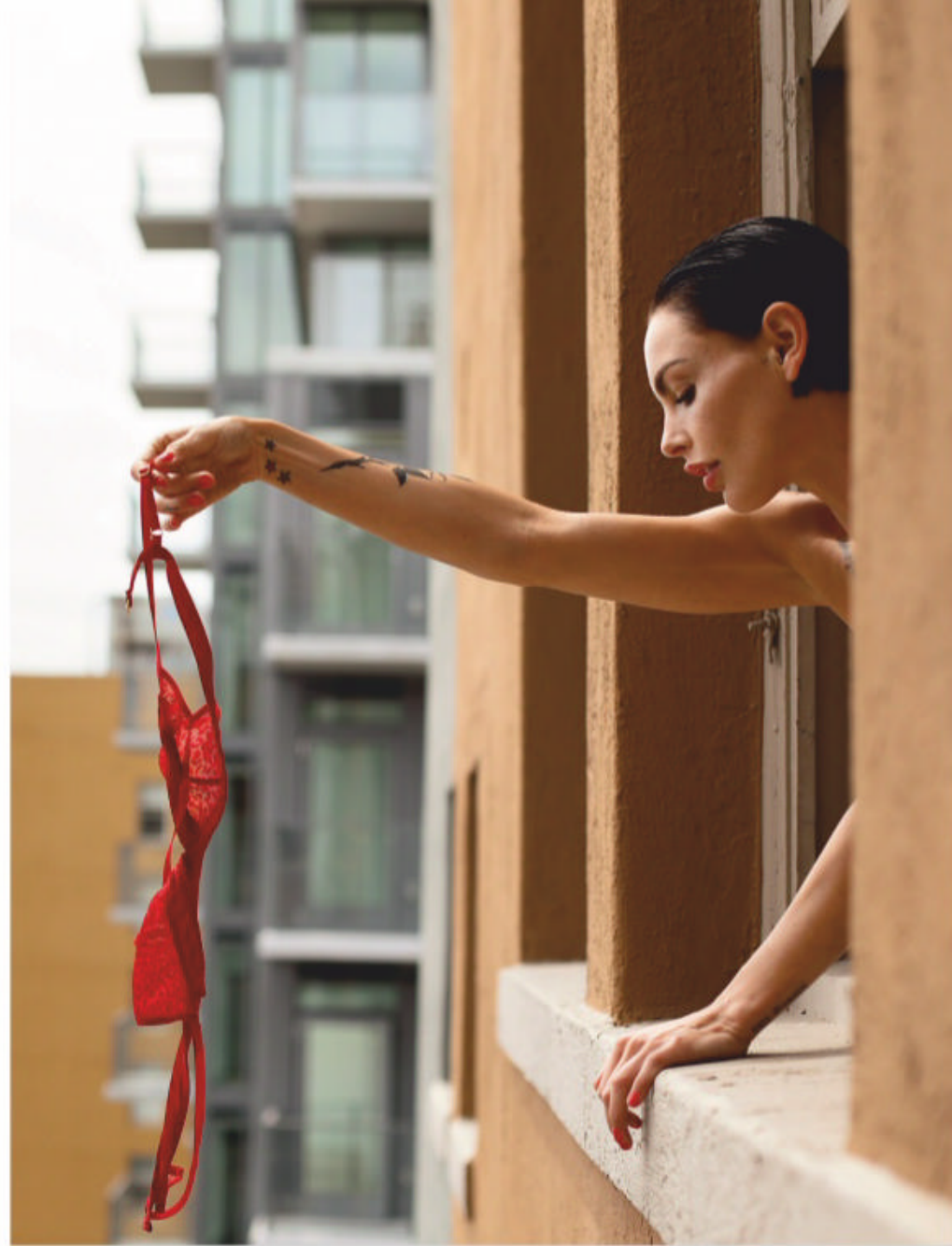
STYLING BY KELLEY ASH; LEFT: SILVER MOON BRA AND BRIEF FROM THE PLAYBOY COLLECTION BY COCO DE MER

JULY PLAYMATE

Love is
about a
soul-to-soul
connection.
It's not
about labels.
Love is love.



Spend a sweltering summer afternoon
with **Teela LaRoux**—July Playmate,
world traveler and fearless lover of life



I'm a hardworking, goofy, adventurous firecracker—a little free spirit creating the life I've always envisioned. I want people to find love, and I want people to love themselves.

I grew up in Seattle, a middle child with two brothers raised by a single mother and grandmother. One day when I was 13, I was working at the front desk of my mom's beauty salon and a model came in to prep for a show. She asked my mom, "Who's the girl at the desk?" From there, I went to an open call, and a couple of months later I was in Milan for my first job abroad. I graduated from high school at 16 and was offered a four-year scholarship to college, but I gave it up to travel the world. I had to grow up pretty quickly, but I learned more abroad than I ever could have in school.

I'm so grateful for the experiences I've had as a model, but the industry definitely took its toll. I went through a 10-year eating disorder and suffered bouts of depression and anxiety. Discovering holistic healing and nutrition helped me love myself and my body. Just last year I earned my certification in nutrition and personal training through the National Academy of Sports Medicine, and I plan to use my credentials to help adolescents and women in the industry attain their fitness and health goals naturally.

Modeling for **PLAYBOY**? I never in a million years thought it would happen for me. I love what the brand is doing now: The vision is much more inclusive and progressive, and my

experience on set was the best in all my 16 years of modeling. If you struggle with self-love or body dysmorphia, posing nude can be a vulnerable experience, but at the same time it can be empowering. I felt strong. I felt beautiful. I'd never really done a nude shoot before, and I didn't realize I could feel so much love for myself in doing one.

Right now my passion lies in helping others. I use my social-media platform to promote female empowerment, authenticity and strength. Girls as young as 12 ask me questions about anxiety, eating disorders and struggling to understand their sexuality. I've been a part of the LGBTQ community my entire adult life, and I was predominantly with women until I met my boyfriend. (Ironically, I've received a lot of blowback for no longer being in a homosexual relationship from the same people I've always sided with and fought for.) So when I receive messages from girls who ask about coming out, wondering if they're gay, bi or fluid, I feel it's my duty to tell them, "It's okay, whatever you are, as long as you're happy."

I've always fought for equality, tolerance and acceptance. For a long time I felt pressured to label myself, but the older I've become, the more I've realized that love is about a soul-to-soul connection. We all want to experience love. It's not about gender, and it's not about labels.

At the end of the day, I just want people to be happy. Love is love: I will always believe that to be true.











DATA SHEET



BIRTHPLACE: Seattle, Washington **CURRENT RESIDENCE:** Los Angeles, California

ON ROLE MODELS

Growing up—and to this day—my role models have been my mother and grandmother. They're two strong women who did everything they could to put us first and give us a great life. They're supportive and accepting and always taught me to persevere. That made me the strong woman I am today.

ON LIVING ABROAD

After I started modeling I moved to Paris and fell in love with the city. I stayed there for years; Paris was my home base growing up. The European way of life is so different from the American, and culturally it was a beautiful way to learn and grow into adulthood.

ON PETS

I have two kooky pups. Both are rescues, and they definitely keep me on my toes. Roux is a Pomeranian mix, and Franklin is a spaniel mix. I strongly

support adopting pets over purchasing them from breeders. There are so many animals in shelters that need homes and love.

ON MUSIC

The last thing I listened to on Spotify was "Devil Like Me" by the band Rainbow Kitten Surprise. I've seen them live a couple of times, and their stage performance is rad. I love going to shows and finding new artists.

ON BOOKS

One of my favorite books is *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho. I've read it multiple times. It's a beautiful story with the underlying theme of following your dreams and listening to your heart.

ON SIGNS

I'm definitely an Aries. I'm a rising Virgo and a Sagittarius moon. I'm a little bit of

each trait. I'm determined and passionate, loyal and hardworking. I just want to make stuff happen in life.

ON STYLE

My style doesn't really have a definition. Every day is different. Some days I put on a power red lip, and others I'm in a T-shirt and jeans, riding my Harley. I love feeling comfortable in my own skin.

ON SEIZING THE DAY

My boyfriend and I are adrenaline junkies. That's a huge part of why we work so well. Life is short; we want to do everything we desire, because tomorrow, tonight, we may not be here. We're going out of this world doing as many of the things we want as we can.

ON HIDDEN TALENTS

I can make a three-leaf clover with my tongue!

Teula La Roux







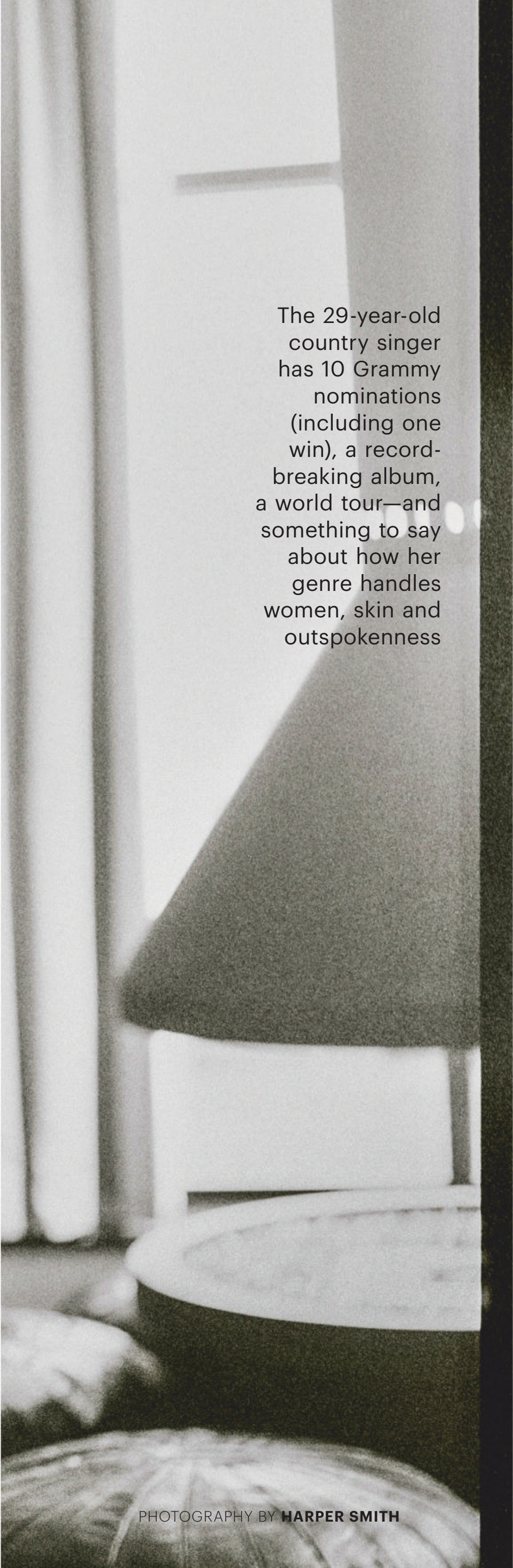


Mindy Levine

20 / Q

WARREN MORRIS





The 29-year-old country singer has 10 Grammy nominations (including one win), a record-breaking album, a world tour—and something to say about how her genre handles women, skin and outspokenness

BY ANDREA DOMANICK

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Q1: Your 2016 debut, *Hero*, won you a Grammy, and this year's follow-up, *Girl*, was streamed 24 million times in its first week—the most for any studio country album by a woman. What does the spirit of this transition, from *Hero* to *Girl*, mean to you?

MORRIS: I wrote the bulk of *Hero* around four years ago at a time when virtually no women were being played on country radio. And from the few who were, I felt I wasn't hearing my perspective. I wanted to hear less from a girl singing to a guy about how cute he is and how she wants him to notice her, and more from the perspective of 20-somethings who are out of college but aren't quite ready to settle down. Those fun few years when you're just a mess, you've got a few flings but are starting to come into your womanhood and adulthood. You're not making as many of the same mistakes as you did in your early 20s, but you're still not ready to call it a day. I wanted to be the sassy voice of reason. I was also going through a tough breakup after five years in my first real relationship. At the same time, my career was starting to take off. So *Hero* was part breakup record, part me finding my independence.

Over the next few years, I started to become more of a boss and a sort of CEO for myself, putting my band and crew on salary, giving them health insurance, becoming the head of this machine.

I also fell in love. I started to open up more to my fans. I wanted people to know I'm still that girl, but I'm growing up and I'm okay with being vulnerable. It's not a weakness. When you find an equal in your life, it's not you giving up anything or any part of you; it's sharing your whole self with another whole self. It took me a second to realize that's a good thing.

Q2: *Girl* meditates on everything from craving sex and being in love to moments of yearning and the more emotional nuances of being a woman. How do you approach writing about these topics in a time when feminism and womanhood tend to be associated with a take-no-prisoners kind of strength?

MORRIS: By being honest with myself and knowing I don't have the sassy, armored exterior many of my fans probably think I have. I've learned it's okay to not be a badass all the time. Over the past few years, as I wrote *Girl*, I learned that it's not a weakness to be vulnerable with somebody else, to share all your light and your darkness with them, to trust that they won't trample your heart or judge you. That was such a learning curve for me, because I used to think if



Locking into becoming an established country artist has been daunting.

you were vulnerable and admitted how much you needed someone, you were being submissive. That's so far from the case. Saying I need my husband [country singer-songwriter Ryan Hurd] isn't me submitting to his power. It's me being independent and saying, "Yeah, I need your fucking time right now."

It's healthy to tell someone that. It's not co-dependent; it's a gift. It takes strength. It takes balls. My acceptance of that felt like, Wow, this is some woman shit. There's strength in the femininity of needing someone but also in having the confidence to ask for it.

Q3: *The album's title track has become an anthem among your fans. Can you explain its meaning?*

MORRIS: It's about a fight I was having with another woman who's also in the music industry. Women in this industry are often pitted against each other. It's not our fault, but we internalize it, because that's what women do. We take on the weight, because we're always so quick to apologize and make peace when we should be like, "Actually, this is *their* issue, not ours. We need to figure this out. It's not our fault there are so few slots that we turn on each other."

Q4: *Yet you've also said, "Being a woman isn't the most interesting thing about me."*

MORRIS: "What's it like to be a woman in the music industry today?" is the question I'm most sick of being asked. My husband is an artist as well, and no one ever asks him what it's like to be a man in the industry today. What would he say? "Same as it ever was." I never know how to re-answer that question. I don't know how to answer it in the first place, actually, because I don't want to be remembered for being a great female artist. I would like to be known as a great artist.

Q5: *Last year you were featured on Zedd's "The Middle," one of the biggest songs of 2018, which landed three Grammy nominations. What do you wish people knew about you now that you have a higher profile?*

MORRIS: I would love for people to do their research and know that I'm not just an artist. I started as a writer and wrote for other artists, and I co-produced my last two albums. I don't get a ton of questions about my work in that realm. It's always, "So you changed your hair and, like, how crazy is that?" It's like, Motherfucker, I produced my album, thanks.

Q6: *Okay, we'll take the bait. How has your background as a songwriter shaped you as an artist?*

MORRIS: I learned so much in my years

behind the scenes. I had to help produce my own demo sessions, and I definitely learned how to listen to and follow trends on the radio as a writer, for research. That has helped me pick singles; I know what hits my ear. Sometimes I'm right, sometimes I'm wrong—but most of the time I've been right. It comes from studying in the “university” of Nashville songwriting and learning from people who were better than me.

Not thinking you can produce is a mentality even incredible writers are forced into. It's not an easy line of work, but when you love every facet of making music, you really do care how a guitar sounds. You care about the reverb on your vocal or how loud the bass is—details like that. I love sinking my teeth into it. That's why it takes me so long to make music, because I overthink it sometimes.

Q7: *Are you a perfectionist?*

MORRIS: I'm a perfectionist until I'm not. I know when I get a gut feeling about something and it's done. Some people will just keep working on music, remixing it and changing things little by little until it's two years later. And then you never put it out. Luckily I have a bone in my body that tells me, “Okay, you can't do anything else to this.”

Q8: *Various headlines have described you as being restricted by country. Are media outlets getting the narrative right?*

MORRIS: In a sense, no, because I actually am played on the radio. For the past two years I've been the most-played woman on country radio. It's still way less than a man, but for some reason my music is being played. It's not just about having a catchy song; it's because I don't sound like anyone else. At the beginning, that was hard, but all my singles have been risks. Even doing “The Middle” was a risk, because I was risking that country radio would think I was abandoning them because I was part of this giant pop song.

That I'm restrained in any way is a dumb perception, because I've tried to kick ass at everything I do. I work hard. I wish the same for my sisters, because they work just as hard, if not harder, than I do, and they don't get a single spin on the radio. I don't think I'm pissing on my success by speaking up for them. I'm just trying to say, while I have the success and while I'm here, why aren't any of my friends getting played? I want to shine a light while I have it and not let it be just about me.

Q9: *The past few years have seen greater cross-over between country and pop. Is this helping country music? What do you think when people suggest that country music needs saving?*

MORRIS: There will always be traditionalists in every genre who try to hold on to the old. I have respect for that, because there's so much about country music—classic country music—that I love. But every generation has been accused of ruining country music, even the outlaw era of Waylon and Willie. Country is evolving. It's always evolving. You'll always have purists no matter what.

Q10: *So cross-pollination between genres is a good thing?*

MORRIS: Country artists having songs on the pop charts and on pop radio this past year

has only helped our genre. Most young people who stream music don't listen to it because of its genre; they listen to it because it's popular, or they discovered it on a playlist and it makes them feel something. When I did “The Middle” with Zedd, most of the world had never heard of me. A lot of people have checked out my country music as a result. It has brought a lot of awareness, fans and listeners to country music, especially recently. It's good for our genre to cross-pollinate, because it makes for better music. It's keeping everyone on their toes and not regurgitating the same kind of art on the conveyor belt.

Q11: *You performed at this year's Grammys with Miley Cyrus and Dolly Parton, and you recently invited pop star JoJo to perform with you on-stage in Los Angeles during your world tour. What other artists do you want to sing with?*

MORRIS: I would love to sing with Kehlani. I saw H.E.R. at the Grammys, and she was incredible. I love Khalid. If I'm shooting real high, I would love to sing with Beyoncé. That's the pinnacle.

Q12: *Bigger success has opened you up to more criticism. You've been slut-shamed and body-shamed online quite a bit. Why are you still dealing with this in country-music culture?*

MORRIS: It's a transitional time. Everyone's super anxious. A lot of it is the political climate, the culture of social media. Anytime someone is courageous or doesn't try to blend in, it pisses people off. It's been like this forever, but we're much more connected now than we used to be. A lot of hot-button things that seem small explode into something huge.



Q13: Have you ever regretted something you've said publicly?

MORRIS: Not really. Every time I've spoken up or clapped back at some troll, it has been very much me. I wouldn't go back on any of it, because they deserved it. Body shamers? They're asking for it. I would never regret calling them out.

At one point I posted a picture of Emma González, one of the survivors of the Parkland shooting, and I lost probably 5,000 followers. To not be able to share an opinion, or to lose fans and ticket sales over it, is so mind-boggling to me, because it's an American right—a human right—to be able to voice your opinion. Of course, any fan has the choice to quit buying your music or listening to it. But as a tax-paying citizen, I should be allowed to speak up when I'm passionate about something. It's always to increase awareness. It's to let my fans know where I stand. I don't want to be one of those head-in-the-sand artists who's only worried about keeping the money in my pocket. I get only one life here, and if I'm going to be a musician and do this thing I've been given a gift for, I would like people to know what I believe in. This is where I stand, this is what I want, this is the world I want my kids to live in. That's why I speak up when I do. It definitely ruffles feathers. Not many country artists speak up.

Q14: Not many country artists have agreed to be photographed by PLAYBOY either.

MORRIS: I remember Dolly Parton's amazing [October 1978] PLAYBOY cover and reading about the drama surrounding this wholesome figure being part of a magazine that has showcased naked women for decades. It was such a faux pas in country music, and yet she ended up making one of the most iconic PLAYBOY covers of all time. Not many other country artists have done that.

I was intrigued, because so many of the moves Dolly made in her career were about bucking the status quo, especially when it came to sexuality and gender norms within country music. As a woman in country music—as a woman in any genre—it always fascinated me. So when I heard this magazine wanted to interview and photograph me, I thought, Okay, I've seen a lot of wonderful spreads you guys have done with artists I love, such as Halsey, so what the hell?

Q15: Are you concerned about how people might react to your being in this magazine?

MORRIS: I'm speaking such a loud, noisy concept of what it means to be a woman in the music industry right now. This feels like I'm amplifying a message I've been passionate about since the beginning that has intensified in the past year. I feel I've already challenged a lot of sexual norms. It's funny, because it's not that risqué in the grand scheme of things. Even the cover of *Girl* is slightly risqué, but it feels like me—throwback but a little modern. I knew it would piss some people off that I was in a bra top. Doing PLAYBOY has been a really fun challenge. I'm trying to do more things that scare me. Every year I'm trying to peel back my layers emotionally—and I guess physically.

Q16: What else scares you?

MORRIS: Locking into becoming an established country artist with each passing year has been daunting. It's where I'm comfortable; it's what I grew up in. But I'm sick of the standards we've been forced into, and it scares me that I'm getting so fed up with certain norms.

Q17: How so?

MORRIS: I could just shut up and sing, keep my head down, not talk about politics or sexuality in my songs. But I swear quite a bit. I talk openly about drinking. I'm learning things about myself that are starting to freak me out, in a good way. I'm growing





up, and that doesn't necessarily mean becoming more mature or wiser or buttoning things up a bit more. Sometimes it's letting it all be a little more freewheeling.

Q18: *You've been married for just over a year. What has marriage taught you?*

MORRIS: It's taught me that I'm not always right. I've been doing this music thing for so long that it's how I'm conditioned. Letting someone else in and letting him be a part of that with me has been a bigger struggle than I imagined. It's so easy to fall in love, but to stay in love and to fall deeper into love? That's work. It's not giving up your stance but allowing yourself to listen. You both could be right; just because you disagree with somebody doesn't mean they're wrong.

Being married for the past year has also helped me figure out more who I am independently. For example, my husband is very much a feminist, and I've never really done anything that's freaked him out. He has always been accepting. Even with **PLAYBOY**, he was like, "That's really hot." It's awesome to be with somebody who is an equal and isn't trying to make you feel like a skank because you're proud of your body—someone who's not watering down your ideologies for patriarchal and bullshit

standards that women in country music have been locked into for the past several decades.

Q19: *What makes you feel sexy?*

MORRIS: I've been trying to be better at exercising the past year or two. I don't want to be skinny. I want to be strong and feel like Lara Croft. I remember when choosing *Girl's* cover, I was like, Yeah, I have this body; I'm going to put it on the cover! I felt really sexy because I knew I was going to get flak for it, from these little titties, but I'm definitely owning it. I like when I scare the absolute shit out of myself like that. That's when I feel sexy. That's what gets me off.

Q20: *What should our readers know about sex or sexuality that maybe they haven't thought about?*

MORRIS: Lingerie is supremely overrated and unnecessary. Also, I would say that if you're in a relationship and that person isn't going down on you on the regular, dump them. If it doesn't happen enough early on, you know what you're getting for the rest of it. A selfish lover is a no-go from the get-go. Just dump him, dump her, dump whoever it is. If you can't sometimes give and sometimes take or have a completely equal experience, then that person is probably selfish in many other facets of his or her life as well. ■

OUR COUNTRY, WHICH ART IN PANIC

WHEN IT COMES TO SEX AND POLICY, NOBODY SEEMS TO KNOW WHICH SIDE WILL BE ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF HISTORY





teach a university class called Gender, Sex and the Law for which I give a series of lectures on Title IX, the 1972 antidiscrimination law that guarantees equal access to education, regardless of sex, at schools that receive federal funding. Lately my lectures have focused more on due process and Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos's recently proposed changes to the law, some of which would bolster the rights of those accused of sexual assault.

DeVos is the point person for policy changes that would modify Obama-era directives on how Title IX violations are handled on college campuses. Since 2017 she has walked back more than 20 directives, including one that addressed patterns of racial disparity in imposing school punishment. Many of DeVos's policies have been criticized by national higher-education groups and pummeled by the media as well as left-leaning students. During one recent lecture I decided to avoid mentioning her by name in an effort to separate political assumptions from policy debate.

Without a doubt, campus sexual misconduct violates the provisions of Title IX. But investigations of such violations are hardly fail-safe. Since 2011, the U.S. government has conducted 502 "investigations of colleges for possibly mishandling reports of sexual violence," according to data from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. My students saw compelling reasons for revising current Title IX procedures. They agreed that changing the burden of proof from what has been dubbed the "50 percent plus a feather" standard to a "clear and convincing" one would better serve justice; anything less than that simply wasn't tough enough, given the gravity of assault charges. They also believed that mandated faculty reporting, which infantilizes students by taking the decision to report an alleged assault out of their hands, should be ended.

My students smartly debated whether a college administrator or our criminal justice system is better suited to adjudicate sexual-assault charges. They questioned the validity of the term *sexual misconduct*, noting that it collapses harassment and rape into one bucket of behavior. They worried about the consequences of ill-equipped employees implementing policies; training tools such as Title IX instructional videos and multiple-choice quizzes, for example, reek of school administrators doing the bare minimum, my students said.

Here's the reveal: Not knowing the architect of the aforementioned Title IX revisions, my left-leaning students, many of them women and people of color, found themselves inadvertently siding with DeVos. Some were stunned to realize they agreed with a person they find morally objectionable. Yet here they were doing just that while having thoughtful discussions based on legal principle rather than party affiliation.

This anecdote is representative of the current state of sexual politics and how, as pointed out by *The New Yorker's* Masha Gessen in 2017, recent watershed moments have exploded into a full-blown frenzy across sex culture in America. As Gessen astutely summarizes, "Sex panics in the past have begun with actual crimes but led to outsize penalties and, more importantly, to a generalized sense of danger. The object of fear in America's recent sex panics is the sexual predator."

We as a society can agree that the most effective policies are based on reliable data and rational debate. Moral panic on the right and purity politics on the left interfere with our right to sexual safety, pleasure and free expression by encouraging political in-fighting and self-censorship. Both threaten to replace the exchange of facts and civil examination of controversial ideas.

While this tension may seem most prevalent in the public discourse surrounding DeVos's Title IX proposals, there are myriad "watershed moments" in which civil policy-making has been supplanted by partisan uproar and triggered panic. Sex is at the center of every one of these debates. Consider the frequent trivialization of due process in discussions about Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation hearings (even while Christine Blasey Ford's testimony was compelling); the Supreme Court's weighing in on religious bakers who refused to sell wedding cakes to homosexual couples; the controversial passage of FOSTA-SESTA; and the removal of adult content from Tumblr.

Outside politics, we're contending with morality wars over slut- and body-shaming; the uncomfortable truth that both consent and harassment are not absolutes; never-ending reports of sexual abuse within the Catholic Church; unsubstantiated claims of homophobia and racism from the Hollywood elite; young people's supposed disinterest in sex (the so-called "millennial sex drought"); and the national rise in STI rates. On any one day, any of these sex-culture stories vie for our attention, and for good reason. But in the face of outrage and the demand for rapid social change, unintended consequences have arisen. Somehow sex, in addition to the sexual predator, has become the enemy. Welcome to the sex panic of this generation.

THE ROOT OF PANIC

The uncompromising outrage of activists and survivors has no doubt drawn important attention to sexual misconduct and egregious criminal behavior. Outrage brings awareness to long-buried issues in desperate need of justice. Outrage has resulted in the #MeToo movement, the formation of Time's Up and the galvanization on display at the annual Women's March. Outrage is a righteous and necessary vanguard in a free society.

Outrage is different from sex panic, however. The former exposes; the latter silences. Panic rejects nuance, debate and disagreement in favor of party lines and swift action. Panic has resulted in the rise of cancel culture and the dismissal of due process. By the time we can consider whether we're in a full-blown cultural panic, rational thinking has already been cast aside. It becomes risky to ask for facts and data. In a sex panic, it becomes imprudent to question the extent to which sex-based discrimination exists. It becomes dangerous to suggest that all sexual violations, and all experiences of sexual violence, are not equivalent. As a consequence, we learn to shut up and sit down lest we face public condemnation and risk being attacked on the internet.

While moral panic around sex is nothing new, moral panic is more about social control than ethical guidelines for how we should get along with one another. We have long fretted over how women dress, move, think and speak. Young New York City women of the late 1800s could be arrested for simply going to dance halls because it was seen as a threat to social order. Flappers in the 1920s were deemed amoral for their bobbed haircuts and dance-floor shimmies. Rihanna caused an uproar when she wore a see-through crystal gown to the 2014 CFDA Fashion Awards. Some wondered if she was a suitable role model for today's youth. These are moral panics.

The list goes on, but morality is not the driving cause of today's divide. At least not on its own. You need to exacerbate moral panic with public backlash, political motivations and the influence of technology. This, I would argue, is the anatomy of today's sex panic.

This perfect storm has also created a culture in which we desire nothing more than for our friends and neighbors to agree with our interpretation of a "moral, just society." No one definition, however, can be truly inclusive, informed or progressive. Instead, well-intended attempts to regulate morality only heighten panic

by promoting, for example, sex-trafficking laws that ignore racist immigration policies and degrade sex workers as second-class citizens, or online-pornography regulations that impinge on free speech and artistic expression.

We don't need to look outside our borders for evidence that today's sex panic has been bubbling up for years. The state of Utah passed a resolution and the Republican Party issued a proclamation in 2016 stating that pornography is a public health issue, despite the lack of reliable evidence proving it is. Since 2017 the left has rushed

to shame anyone accused of any offense, from Senator Al Franken to comedian Aziz Ansari. Crucial conversations, including lessons on consent in public-school sex education, are buried under louder tweet storms about toxic masculinity and the power of the patriarchy. Awkward sexual encounters continue to be conflated with the worst of accusations. And then: If he's accused, he must have done it.

That particular assumption was evident at Pomona College's annual Great Debate event in the spring of 2018. The liberal arts college, situated outside Los Angeles, provided a forum for discussion about campus sexual assault. The panelists included author Roxane Gay, Northwestern University film studies professor Laura Kipnis and attorney Brett Sokolow, president of the Association of Title IX Administrators and CEO of TNG, a risk-management consulting and law firm.

The crowd of undergraduates booed Kipnis—who'd been

the subject of two Title IX investigations after authoring a *Chronicle of Higher Education* article critical of current procedure and defending a Northwestern colleague who'd been disciplined for sexual harassment—for suggesting (if a bit dispassionately) that due process was important in campus adjudication of sexual misconduct. Gay, a hero among millennials and feminists, received applause following her claim that wealthy and famous men accused of #MeToo violations would "be just fine" in the long run.



That line of thinking concerns Lara Bazelon, director of the Racial Justice Clinic at the University of San Francisco School of Law. “No matter the evidence, supporters of victims’ rights are willing to suspend procedural justice or the rule of law to expel the accused,” she says, even though “due process is the bedrock of our system.”

Bazelon’s perspective is informed by her years of work representing poor people and those who are statistically likelier to be oppressed by the judicial system. Such oppression disproportionately maps onto communities of color. Black male students are more severely impacted by Title IX, Bazelon says, much as black men are overrepresented in the prison system. Gay was talking specifically about privileged men, but assuming accused sexual violators will “be just fine” in the absence of due process glosses over systemic racism on campuses and in courtrooms across the country. This pattern extends beyond the formal criminal justice system to the internet and its nurturing of cancel culture.

Controversially, the NAACP’s St. Louis County branch has come out in support of Missouri state legislation that would implement DeVosian revisions. “The denial of due process at Missouri’s colleges disproportionately impacts African American men and that’s why we call for immediate due process reforms,” John Gaskin III, the chapter’s president, said in a press release. The NAACP’s national office and the Missouri state branch both oppose DeVos’s proposed changes to Title IX protections, however, commenting that while Missouri needs to protect civil rights, rewriting Title IX is not the pathway.

“Misogyny shapes a culture in which survivors aren’t believed. Anti-blackness shapes a culture in which some individuals may feel ‘uncomfortable’ around black people and project that as ‘unsafe.’ Both these statements are true,” says Twanna A. Hines, an award-winning sex educator. Thus, our current sex panic has no doubt resulted in missed opportunities to investigate Title IX’s racist implications or reeducate people on the importance—and constitutional guarantee—of due process in our democracy.

As galling as it is to find oneself in agreement with DeVos, this does not make one a Trumpist shill. The current political climate means “you’re either on team accused or team accuser,” says Bazelon. “Due process gets pushed aside, because in this scenario, once you’re on your team, it doesn’t matter what the facts are. The left offers full-throated support for the rights of the accused in criminal cases—until it comes to sex offenses. The assumption is that if someone is accused of sexual misconduct, they must be guilty.”

THE COST OF DISAGREEMENT

In late 2018, Bazelon penned a *New York Times* op-ed piece titled “I’m a Democrat and a Feminist. And I Support Betsy DeVos’s Title IX Reforms.” After suggesting that due process is integral to anti-racism, Bazelon received threatening calls saying that she was a moron, that she hates women and that she should die or be fired. She was publicly attacked on Twitter too, at times by people who privately told her they agreed with the fundamental importance of due process. The Twitter attacks largely came from liberals.

Before publishing her op-ed, Bazelon had braced herself for backlash. But she could never have predicted the accusations of racism—particularly confounding given that her life’s work has focused on racial justice. If you’re concerned about sexual violence and also care about justice, due process and people of color, where are you going to stand? It’s a question for which Bazelon has no answer.

More mainstream figures have been similarly excoriated for arguing that unwanted touching, rape and pedophilia are qualitatively distinct. One such figure is actor Matt Damon, who suggested as much in the days after *The New Yorker* published its first exposé on the alleged sex crimes of Harvey Weinstein. Without

question, all the aforementioned acts must be confronted and eradicated, Damon insisted. “Every woman who comes forward with one of these stories deserves to be listened to and heard,” he said.

But that part of his commentary was shoved aside. After suggesting there may be a “spectrum” of bad behavior—that inappropriate behavior is not the same as criminal behavior—Damon apologized on live television.

Damon and others who may share his views have good reason to suggest we need to distinguish between behaviors that fall on a continuum from “bad sexual manners” to “sexual assault.” Yes, this continuum exists within a patriarchal matrix of domination. But when we conflate sincerely apologetic men who may have behaved crudely, such as Senator Franken, with truly criminal men, such as alleged repeat offender R. Kelly, “the clear signal to men and young people is: Deny it. Because if you take responsibility for what you did, your life’s going to get ruined. But if you deny it, you can be in the White House—you can be president.” Damon said this in an ABC News interview.

THE PURSUIT OF TRUTH

When it comes to sexual-misconduct cases on campus, “a lot of times both students are credible,” says Patricia Hamill, a Philadelphia-based attorney who has represented more than 100 students accused of Title IX violations. She explains how crucial misunderstandings can have unequivocally serious impact: “She says, ‘Do you have a condom?’ He hears, ‘That was a yes.’ But she could mean ‘I’m trying to slow you down.’ Or ‘I’m not sure.’” Or perhaps she’s trying to create a pivot so she can figure out what to do.

Because alcohol or drugs often accompany sexual situations on American campuses, this creates complicated situations for adjudication. In our current climate, asking if the people involved were drunk can be viewed as blaming the victim. But equating proper investigation techniques with victim-blaming ignores the truth that alcohol consumption is often a factor in how details are recollected, Hamill says. “In murky situations, both parties very much believe their perception of what happened,” she explains.

People often have an implicit bias toward one version of a story. Bazelon and Hamill share a concern that many Title IX administrators assume all complaints of sexual misconduct have standing. (“If there was a complaint, something must’ve happened.”) In reality, a complaint should only signal the point at which fair procedures begin to be implemented—for all parties involved.

Another complication is when a survivor continues to contact an alleged assaulter. In one highly publicized case, Columbia University student Emma Sulkowicz accused fellow student Paul Nungesser of having raped her in 2012. Two years later, after he was cleared of responsibility by a university disciplinary panel, she turned her experience into performance art, which gained national attention from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, among other outlets. In the days immediately following her alleged attack, Sulkowicz had messaged Nungesser numerous times, her tone ranging from polite to friendly.

“When asked why they texted the next day as if nothing was wrong,” Hamill explains, “some say, ‘I don’t know why I texted that. I was trying to understand what happened. It took a bit of time to realize I was raped.’” It’s important to have a trauma-informed framework that’s sensitive to such inter- and intrapersonal responses that may seem odd to outsiders. “But that can’t be the starting place for adjudication,” Hamill argues. As a judge stated in the 2016 *Doe v. Brandeis* ruling, which involved two male students who’d been romantically involved, “Whether someone is a victim is a conclusion to be reached at the end of a fair process, not an assumption to be made at the beginning.”

“DUE PROCESS GETS PUSHED ASIDE. THE LEFT OFFERS FULL-THROATED SUPPORT FOR THE RIGHTS OF THE ACCUSED IN CRIMINAL CASES—UNTIL IT COMES TO SEX OFFENSES.”

In line with that thinking, Sokolow tells me about a call he once received from administrators after a gay male student attempted to bring Title IX charges against the school. The student was aggrieved by the fact that Chick-fil-A had catered an on-campus training program. Chick-fil-A's president opposes marriage equality and the company has been accused of homophobia.

Students are free to push administrations to make better choices. “But you can't say that eating Chick-fil-A is sex-based discrimination,” Sokolow says. A decade ago, “this claim would have simply been sent away with the clear understanding that the student was not discriminated against.”

Sokolow describes a groupthink impulse wherein “minor affronts lead to vigilante efforts to terminate faculty. We must separate inappropriate actions from egregious violations so we can best address both.”

Should low barriers of proof and unchecked claims of violation continue to be publicly classified as legitimate, one fear, Sokolow says, is that we could find ourselves in situations where “men on campus don't want to mentor female faculty. Hugs are absolutely prohibited in the campus workplace. And while there is good reason for concern about lecherous colleagues who cop a feel or physically abuse their positions of power under the pretense of an affectionate hug, this prohibition cuts two ways. A workplace so sterile you can't express affection for your co-workers is not a place people want to work.”

In California, a state court recently ruled that students accused of sexual misconduct have the right to a hearing and to cross-examine their accusers. As a result, colleges across the state prepared to overhaul their procedures for addressing Title IX complaints, including halting the single-investigator model, in which campus investigators serve as both sleuth and judge.

But what else can be done? For one, a prioritization of education is necessary. This means reeducating both students and the public about due process and the judicial system—important foundations of U.S. democracy. It also means discussing with young people the nuances of consent and the realities of sexual desire. Some argue that a generational shift in understanding is already under way

and that the “millennial sex drought” is temporary but a sign of change. Hamill, the mother of two sons and a college-age daughter, says, “I'm encouraged that younger people are getting better at talking about what they want sexually. People are being up front about their desires.”

We must also shift the cultural mandate from “believe all women” to “listen to women.” Relatedly, “listening well” is the appropriate response to trauma. “Believe women” when you're a friend or a therapist. But what's crucial in an interpersonal context is not necessarily advisable in a legal setting. When it comes to cross-examination, Hamill explains, “you should be sensitively asking questions with respect and dignity.” That doesn't mean avoiding cross-examination altogether.

For adjudication to be just and fair, we need both due process and more information about trauma. This doesn't mean coddling, which alarms the political right, but understanding that victims may be extremely sensitive or seem dispassionate, and in addition to the fight-or-flight response, traumatized people can also have spotty memories or become emotionally or mentally catatonic. None of these displays prove or disprove a case. While campuses and victim-support services are incorporating this trauma-based understanding, it's important to note that this approach is based on controversial research. We must be willing to hit PAUSE; we can't be afraid to admit we just don't know yet.

This doesn't mean all truth is relative. It means we as a society need to be measured in our assessments. It also means shifting our attention. According to Justin R. Garcia of the Kinsey Institute, “For policy-makers who aren't thinking about sex and gender every day as researchers do, legislating these concerns can easily become panics.”

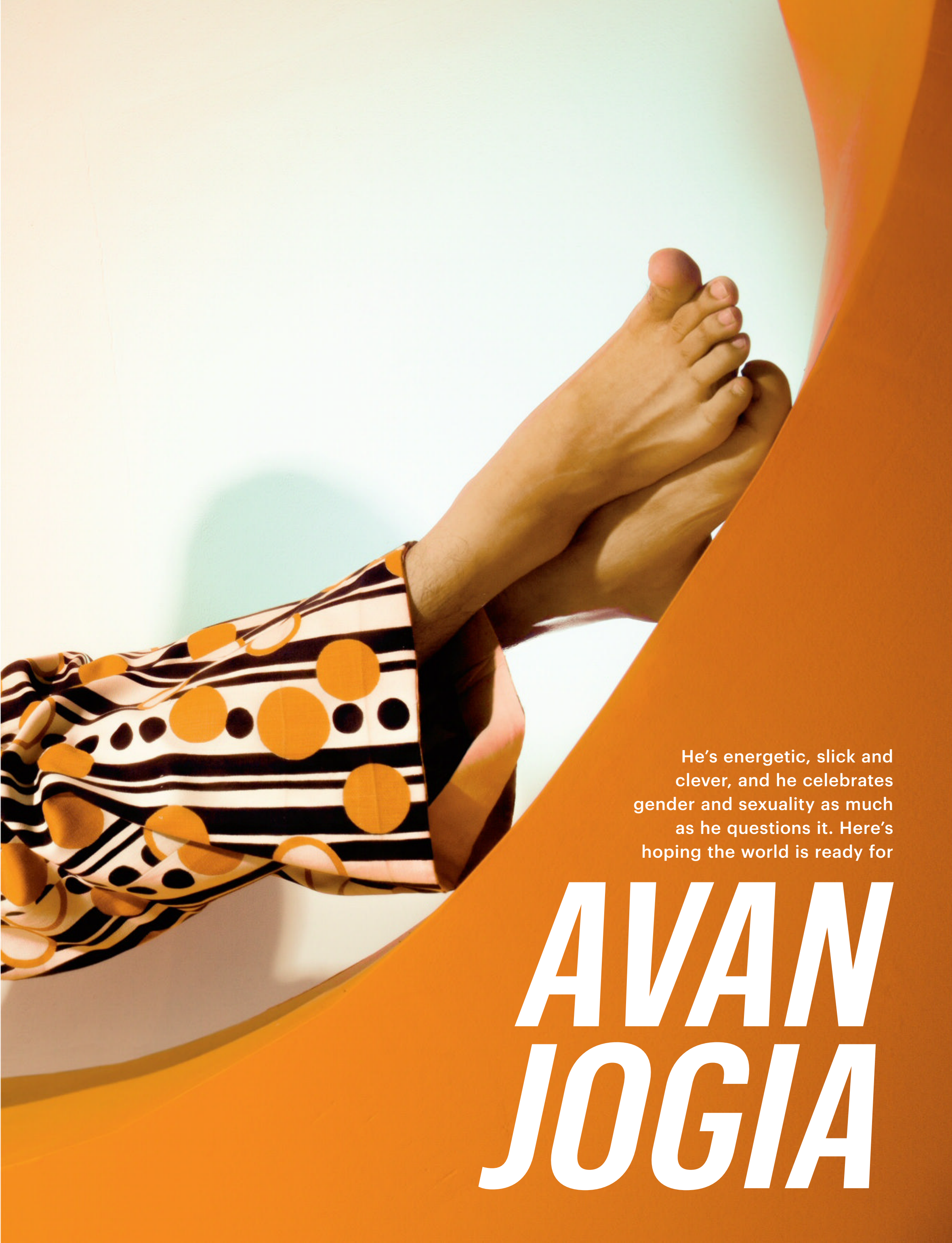
In a culture that fails to prevent rape, harassment and assault, no one is unscathed. It's time to turn our focus from survivors and victims to the perpetrators and bystanders. We must all work to revive an ethics of care and put our relations with others at the center of moral action. Otherwise our sense of truth, justice and morality will continue to become mired in a widespread, unchecked cultural panic—and sex will remain the enemy. ■

AVAIN OGIA

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
DANA TRIPPE

STYLING BY
ANNIE & HANNAH





He's energetic, slick and
clever, and he celebrates
gender and sexuality as much
as he questions it. Here's
hoping the world is ready for

AVAN JOGIA

BY **SANDRA
SONG**

Avan Jogia is upset. Or maybe riled up is a better way to put it. An enthusiastic gesticulator prone to fiery, pathos-driven argument, the 27-year-old actor, author and director is currently railing against the constraints of masculinity. At one point his forceful motioning causes an unceremonious collision of his head against the concrete wall behind him.

Bam! He curses, pausing to take stock before quickly reverting to his breezy, Hollywood-engineered disposition.

“Anyway....”

Jogia smiles and expresses a sentiment he’ll repeat several times in the course of our hour-long conversation. “It’s just weird. I refuse to be told who or what I am,” he says.

Unfortunately, that’s precisely my job, something he jokes about as we embark on a discussion about preferred pronouns. “*He* feels limiting, yet here I am; here *he* is.” Jogia rolls his eyes. “As soon as you say ‘*This* is what a man can be,’ you’ve ruined manhood. By labeling what it can be, you’re actually limiting it.”

A beat passes, and then: “Sorry, I’m ranting again.”

Jogia, once a fixture on Nickelodeon (mainly via the series *Victorious*, which also featured a promising upstart named Ariana Grande) and now an in-demand actor (he’s the lead on *Now Apocalypse*, which premiered on Starz in March), speaks at times with the sort of hesitation common among celebrities who are conscious of the way the world watches them. But Jogia is far more prone to overexplaining than evading—perhaps out of fear of being misquoted, or perhaps because he doesn’t want to leave any room for confusion.

“The weirdest part is observing yourself through the eyes of someone else,” he says, absentmindedly rubbing the back of his head in between sips of iced coffee. “That never happens in real life. Usually you make an impression and you walk away.”

My immediate thought, though, is that Jogia most definitely makes an impression that sticks with people. For example, today his look is “casual,” which for him means no purple faux furs, holographic sunglasses or two-toned leopard-print buzz cuts. Instead he’s channeling 1970s suave, his leisure suit opened to display carefully manicured chest hair—though the choice to dress head to toe in pink linen ends up turning heads outside the chain coffee shop we’re sitting at.

“As soon as you name something, it loses an element of what it is, because it’s been so unceremoniously defined,” Jogia says, explaining that it’s human nature to try to classify the world around us. He later adds, “But as far as labeling my sexuality, I don’t gain anything from that, because all it does is isolate the possibilities of my life. It’s the same thing with gender. If I say ‘I’m a man’—whatever that means—I’m limiting the depth of my humanity.”

Jogia’s goal is to provide options for other people, particularly “little brown kids” who need to know that “we’re not a monolith,” that there are a myriad of

intersectional identities they can occupy outside some de facto norm.

“That’s why I have to be loud,” he says. “My goal is to try to display something different so there are options for who you can be.”

In Jogia’s view, the only idea of masculinity the media presents today is an intensely “buttoned-down version” that lacks room for deviation. Long gone are the days of David Bowie and Prince, his childhood heroes. Instead, all the kids have now is that “singular, leather-jacket-wearing, chestnut-brown-haired guy.”

To Jogia, the pinnacle of masculinity was his father, who was “the strongest man” he knew despite the fact that Indian men are often emasculated—something Jogia says he experienced when he could audition only for “goofy Asian male sidekick” roles, none of which he’d end up getting anyway.

In the past decade Jogia has managed to morph into a Hollywood hotshot with an impressive level of creative freedom. This June he’ll appear in the sequel to *Shaft* and in October in *Double Tap*, the second *Zombieland* installment. He’s also directing his first full-length film, an “electric, fun little punk-rock movie” called *Door Mouse*.

His takeaway from all this? Maybe it’s best to “lose people,” namely the family-friendly audiences who propelled him to top billing in the first place. “The biggest lie would be to organize my life to appease more people,” he says.

That attitude is evident in his choice to play transgressive “sexual astronaut” Ulysses in *Now Apocalypse*. Helmed by Gregg Araki, a luminary of the 1990s New Queer Cinema movement, the series has faced an uphill battle gaining viewership and traction. Still, Jogia is happy to headline a show that depicts boundless sexuality as something worth celebrating. “I happen to think sexuality is fun,” he deadpans. “Fucking shocking, I know.”

He did, however, have reservations about taking on the Ulysses character. Recalling a conversation he had with Araki, Jogia approaches the question of the limits, and constraints, of allyship—especially for a straight-presenting cis-man.

“Uly’s queerness isn’t the totality of who he is. Gregg said to me, ‘There’s a part of you, a part of your soul, that makes you right for this person.’ It’s an aspect of who he is, but that’s not the character,” Jogia says. “It’s not a one-note character—it’s a human being, and human beings have a lot of currents.”

Although he avoids addressing his quiet parting from Straight But Not Narrow, the LGBTQ-ally organization he co-founded, Jogia is reinvigorated by my question about the importance of sexuality in his life and how he chooses to present it to the world. “Why would I purposefully make it boring for me?” he says. “Because of pride or fear or guilt? No!”

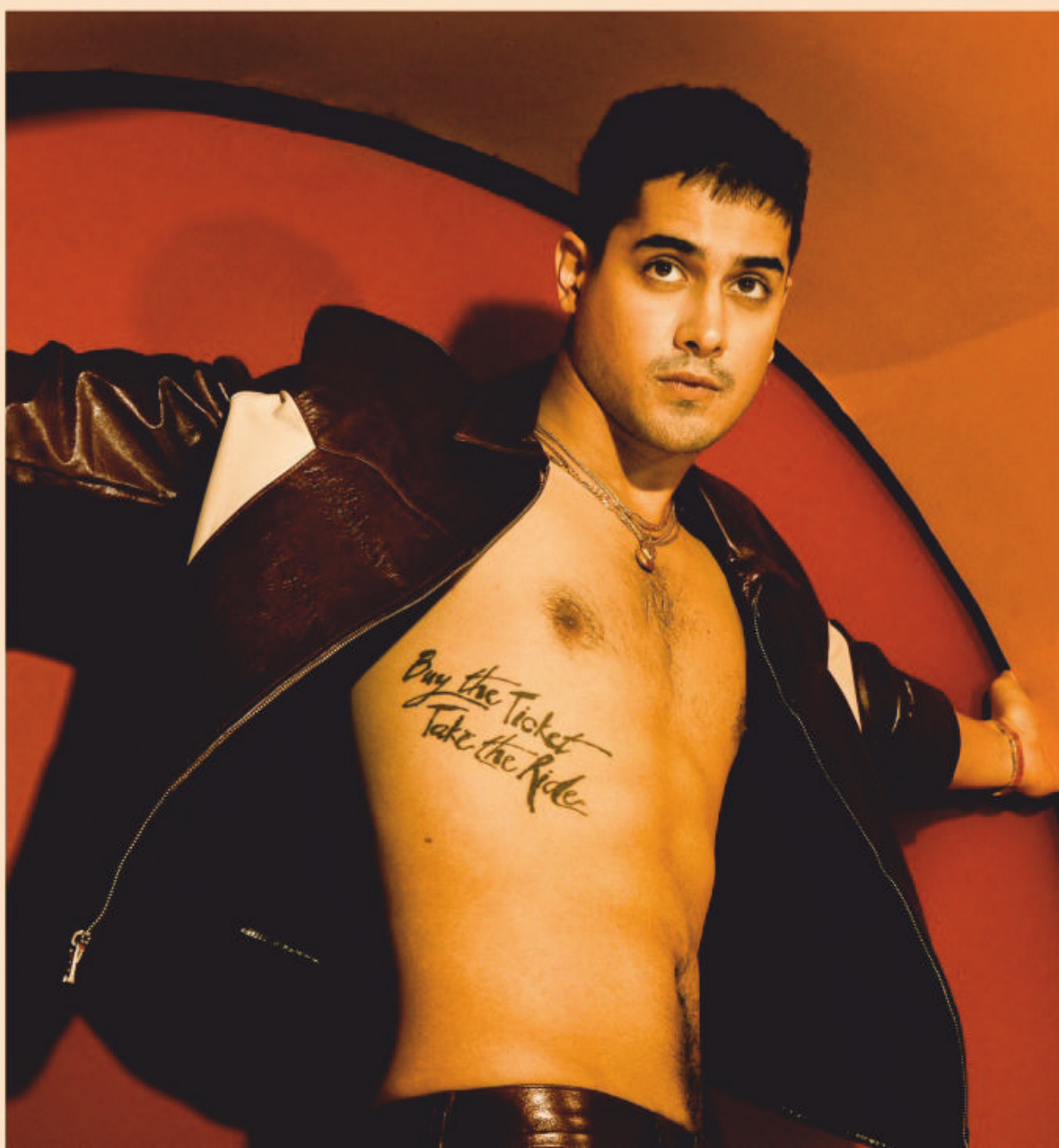
He pauses for a moment before paraphrasing legendary queer cabaret artist David Hoyle. “We’re all going to die. The world’s burning,” he says, laughing and wiggling his shoulders. He slightly extends his arms into the air, and a grin spreads across his face.

“Let’s masturbate.”

I tell him that sounds wonderful.











THE 2019

playboy
sex
survey

A person's hand is resting on their hip, with the fingers slightly spread. The background is a solid teal color. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

When we set out to take a reading of the sexual landscape in the U.S.—our first national sex survey since 2012—we deemed three areas to be of interest: what people do in bed, what people think they should be doing in bed and what people *want* to do in bed. With headlines claiming that young Americans are having less sex than previous generations, we admit we were concerned about what our questionnaire, designed in partnership with RedSky Strategy, might tell us. It turns out we're still having sex—we even value it highly—but no one can agree on what qualifies as the “right amount,” likely due to our free access to sexual imagery (porn) and sexual partners (dating apps). Here's what else the data, pulled from 1,000 survey participants, revealed.

ON SEX & SATISFACTION

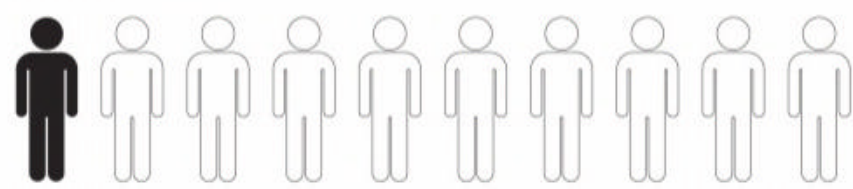
“Sex is life’s ultimate pleasure,” according to more than 40 per-cent of our respondents. This should be cause for celebration, given our nation’s puritanical roots and the myriad claims that we’re experiencing a “sex drought.” There is a caveat, however. After correlating our data, we learned that among people who watch porn, the number who agree with the above statement jumps to almost 60 percent. That might mean either pornography is contributing to a rise in sex positivity or people who like sex are becoming more reliant on porn to get off. Either way, expectations in the bedroom remain vanilla: Relationship sex is the best, according to eight in 10 women, and vaginal inter-course is the best sexual act, according to straight people.

10-20 MINUTES

AVERAGE LENGTH OF TIME A PLURALITY OF HETEROSEXUAL MEN AND WOMEN PREFER VAGINAL INTERCOURSE* TO LAST

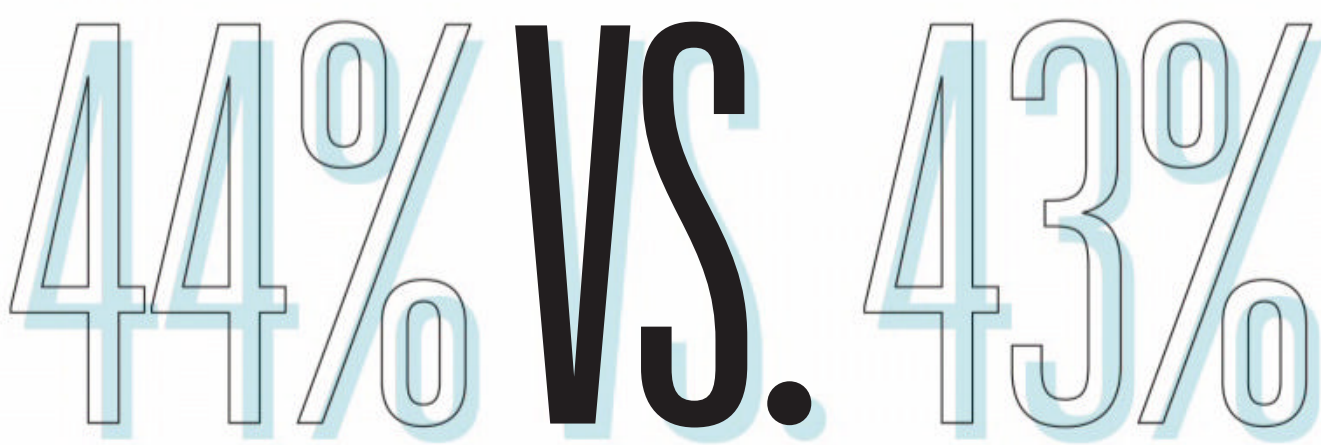
AVERAGE LENGTH OF TIME HOMOSEXUAL WOMEN PREFER VAGINAL INTERCOURSE* TO LAST

5-20 MINUTES



NUMBER OF HETEROSEXUAL PEOPLE WHO WANT VAGINAL SEX* TO LAST LONGER THAN 60 MINUTES

**Reminder, folks: This does not include foreplay.*



PERCENTAGE OF MEN WHO REPORT THAT SEX “**ALWAYS**” ENDS IN THEM HAVING AN ORGASM

PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN WHO REPORT THAT SEX “**REGULARLY TO NEVER**” ENDS WITH THEM HAVING AN ORGASM

IS YOUR SEX LIFE AVERAGE?

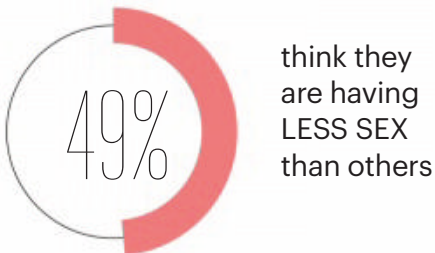
Everyone is great at masturbating, apparently: Half of respondents believe they touch themselves “the right amount.” How much is that, you ask? Men are twice as likely as women to say “at least once a week.”

1/3

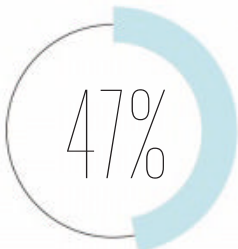
of females say they’ve never sown their own oats

1/5

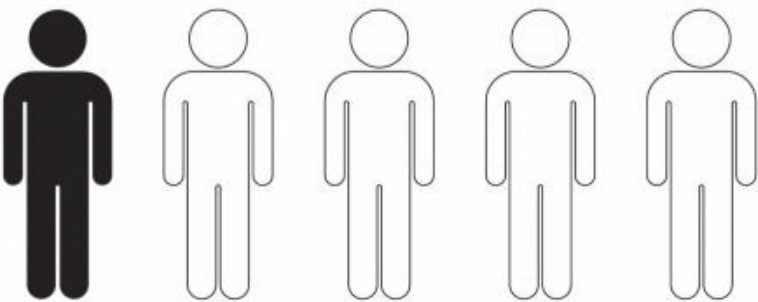
of 25- to 44-year-olds think they should be masturbating way less than they do



think they are having LESS SEX than others



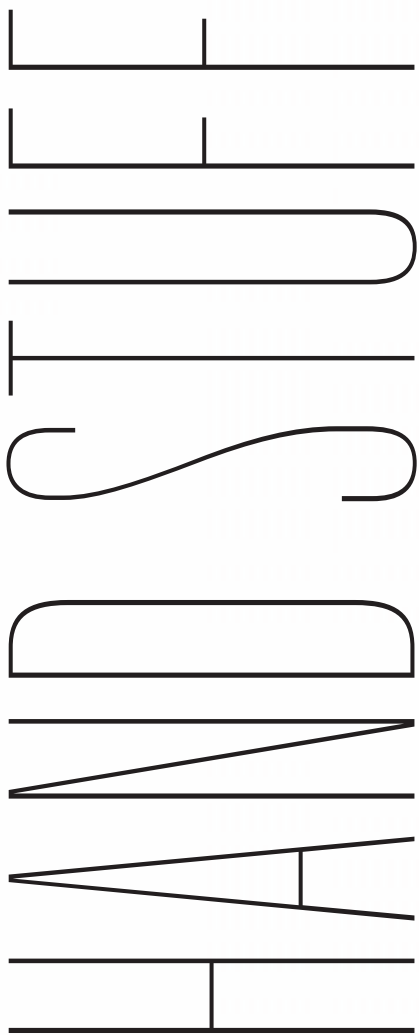
think they should be having WAY MORE SEX



LGBTQ people have more sexual partners overall*, with one in five reporting they’ve had more than **25** sexual partners. The number of sexual partners a plurality of heterosexual people report having had: **1**

**More sexual partners doesn’t equate to a better sex life. LGBTQ people report masturbating more frequently and struggling with sexual performance more often than heterosexual people.*

AFTER VAGINAL SEX, THE ACT PEOPLE MOST WANT TO BE BETTER AT PERFORMING:



70%

report being most comfortable discussing sex with their therapist

OPEN INVITATION?

GENDER

SOME 60 PERCENT OF MEN ARE CURIOUS ABOUT, OR HAVE BEEN IN, AN OPEN RELATIONSHIP. WOMEN? ONLY 34 PERCENT.

ORIENTATION

THREE QUARTERS OF GAY MEN HAVE OR ARE INTERESTED IN EXPLORING AN OPEN RELATIONSHIP.

RACE

ROUGHLY TWO THIRDS OF NON-WHITE PEOPLE HAVE OR ARE INTERESTED IN EXPLORING AN OPEN RELATIONSHIP.

AGE

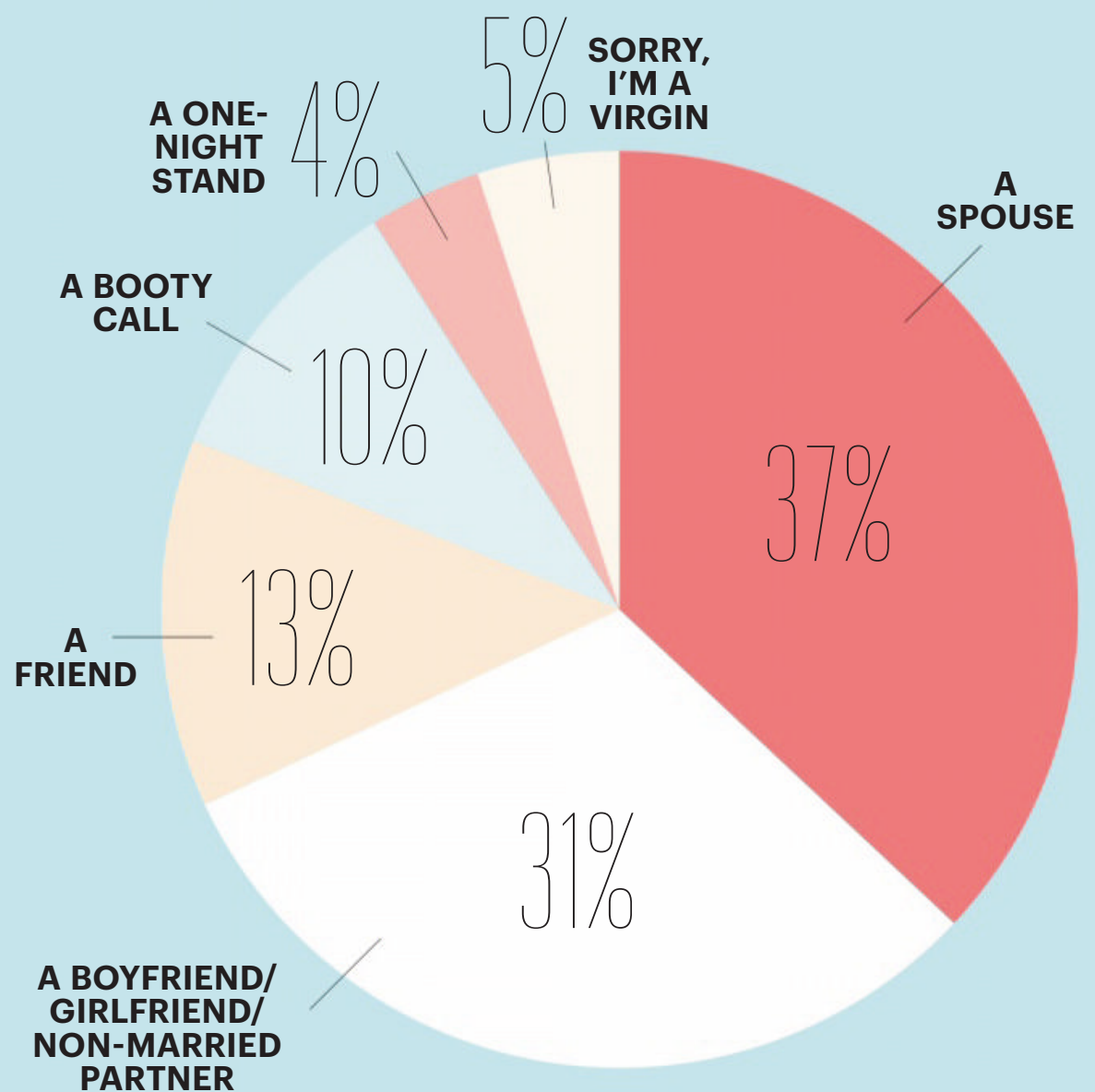
ONE IN 10 PEOPLE AGES 25 TO 34 ARE *ALREADY* IN AN OPEN RELATIONSHIP.

WE STILL VALUE SEX HIGHLY

...especially in the confines of a relationship

Although interest in open relationships is broadening in 2019 (see demographic trends at left), the majority of people consider exclusive relationships sacred. Some evidence: Our research shows that many nonsexual but sexually suggestive acts—flirting and close dancing, for example—qualify as forms of cheating. Fifty-four percent of men and 65 percent of women ranked cuddling as their favorite post-sex activity. While people agree that dating apps are necessary today, roughly one third believe that relationships that “start in the real world are more meaningful.”

WHO MAKES THE BEST SEXUAL PARTNER?



52%

OF **ALL** RESPONDENTS (STRAIGHT AND GAY) HAVE OR ARE OPEN TO EXPLORING CASUAL SEXUAL RELATIONS OUTSIDE THEIR SEXUAL ORIENTATIONS

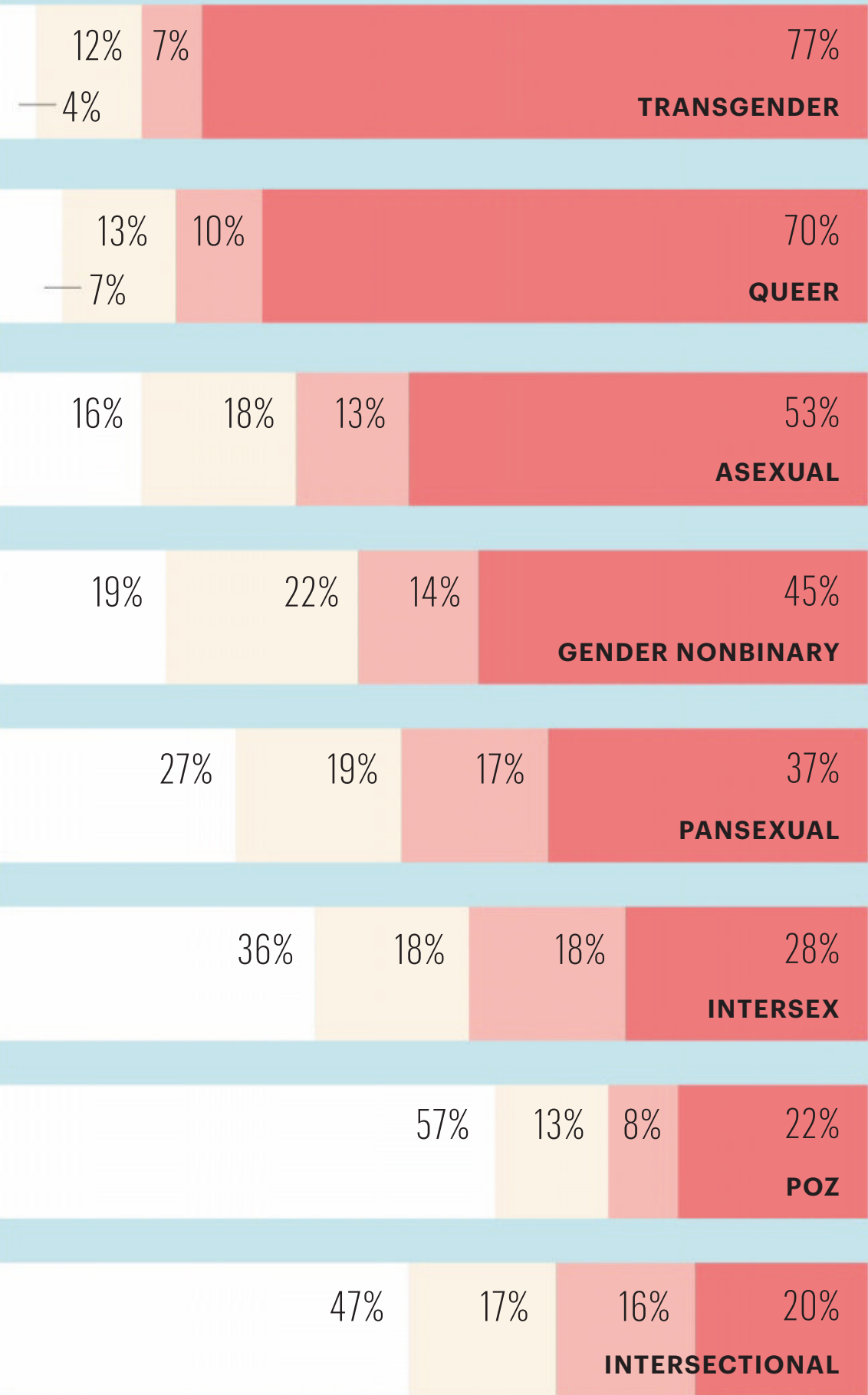
67%

OF **LGBTQ** RESPONDENTS HAVE OR ARE OPEN TO EXPLORING CASUAL SEXUAL RELATIONS OUTSIDE THEIR SEXUAL ORIENTATIONS

WHAT WE KNOW — AND WHAT WE DON'T

Are you cheating on someone right now? Perhaps. Are you pansexual? Maybe. It all depends on your knowledge of the evolving lexicon of sex. For the most part, though, no one knows what they're talking about.

You'd think with all the tapping, sexting and swiping, we'd communicate more about what we like when we get naked. Nope. Only one in 10 people talk about sex "often" with their partner. One in five people "almost never" talk about sex.



68% VS. 67% BY A HAIR, MORE LGBTQ PEOPLE CONSIDER KISSING AN ACT OF CHEATING THAN STRAIGHT PEOPLE...

...BUT FEWER QUEER PEOPLE THINK SEXUAL INTERCOURSE IS A FORM OF CHEATING 75% VS. 83%

LOVE AT A DISTANCE

Midwesterners have a broader definition of cheating, and people in the West are more likely to think their partners are cheating if they have "an intimate emotional connection" with someone else.

A MAJORITY OF WOMEN* AGREE CHEATING INCLUDES:
SEXUAL INTERCOURSE
SEXUAL FAVORS
KISSING
EMOTIONAL CONNECTIONS
GRINDING

A MAJORITY OF MEN DO *NOT* THINK CHEATING INCLUDES:
SLOW DANCING
FLIRTING
EMOTIONAL CONNECTIONS
GRINDING

*Seventeen percent of women do not consider sexual intercourse a form of cheating.

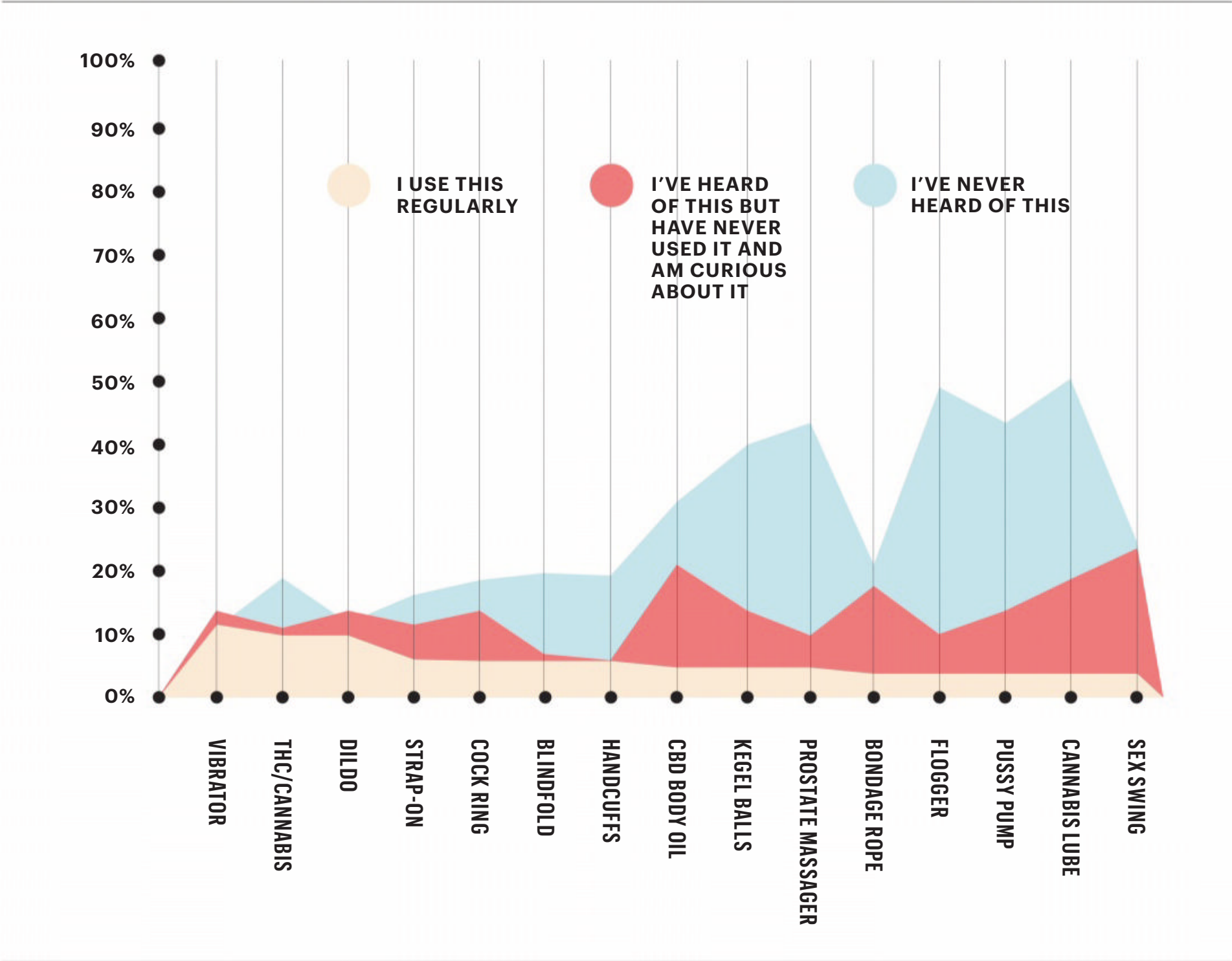
HOLD UP! WOMEN LOVE TO CUDDLE AFTER SEX

What do men prefer to do outside of cuddling?
TALK, WATCH TV TOGETHER—AND
GO STRAIGHT TO SLEEP.

WHAT WE'RE INTO

(NOT MUCH, UNFORTUNATELY)

A majority of people indicated no interest in learning about 31 sex toys they were unfamiliar with; below is a subset of that data. For the 46 percent who don't know what a flogger is: Turn to page 142.



DON'T TELL ME WHAT TO DO

THE SOUTH IS THE MOST **SEXUALLY CONFIDENT** REGION OF THE UNITED STATES, WITH NEARLY ONE THIRD OF SOUTHERN RESPONDENTS AGREEING THEY "ALWAYS KNOW WHAT TO DO IN BED AND ALWAYS GET GREAT FEEDBACK."

RESPONDENTS IN THE WESTERN U.S. WERE THE LEAST LIKELY TO AGREE THAT THEY **"ALWAYS KNOW WHAT TO DO IN BED."**

FROM A LIST OF **10 SEXUAL PRACTICES**, (see right) a majority of respondents said they would like to "get better" at both giving and receiving vaginal intercourse.

NEARLY **30%**

had zero interest in getting better at any of the 10 sexual activities.

MAKING OUT **CUDDLING**
VAGINAL INTERCOURSE
HAND STUFF **SEXTING**
ANAL INTERCOURSE
FELLATIO **ANILINGUS**
HAVING SEX ON CAMERA
CUNNILINGUS



JUSTICE CAN BE SUCH A STICKY BUSINESS

FICTION BY
JOYCE CAROL OATES

After school we began to hear. Certain incidents at night in the old mill town on the Delaware River.

Pop-up parties—for (adult) men.

Girls from Eastern Europe, Asia, Central America were available for a fee. Girls between the ages of 10 and 16. Or maybe six and 16. They'd been transported by night. Initially, some of them, in the (fetid) hulls of ocean vessels. Then in the (fetid) hulls of cattle trucks. They did not speak English. Which languages they spoke, the beauty of these languages, the sorrow of these languages, how *love* was uttered, how *grieving* was uttered, how *loss* was uttered in these languages, we did not know. In the (fetid) hulls into which the girls were herded by men who did/did not speak their languages, they must have whispered, shuddered, moaned, wept and sobbed in one another's arms but in languages we did not know.

Their skin that should have been as soft as ours was rubbed raw. The hair on their heads that should have been lustrous as ours was thick with grease. Lice scurried over their scalps, stung and drew blood. Their eyes—oh, you had to know that their beautiful long-lashed eyes were luminous despite burst capillaries and that they stumbled and groped in daylight like the blind after the long solace of the night.

Informed that they would be tortured—"cut to pieces"—if they did not obey. Their families, whom they would never see again (they knew), would be murdered if they did not obey.

(Were there translators? In our imagining there would have had to be translators.)

(Translation is the most tender of all the arts. Yet, in this case, translation must have been crude, cruel.)

Most of the child sex slaves (as they were called) had come from Eastern Europe, had been shipped west. Sold into bondage by their parents, single mothers, state-run orphanages. There was a contingent of Asian girls, including the very

youngest. Other girls were captured at the southern U.S. border, where they were separated from their families by Border Patrol agents, housed in barracks-like camps behind razor-wire fences or, in special cases, delivered into the custody of Homeland Security consultants who arranged for them to be transported in windowless vans to far-flung parts of the U.S.

Sex slaves taken into custody at the southern U.S. border were believed to differ significantly from those from Eastern Europe and Asia because their families had not given them up voluntarily or sold them; indeed, these girls were taken forcibly from their families, who were not likely to forget them, though they had no means, legal or otherwise, of locating them once they were shipped away from the border and into the heartland of the U.S.

Sex trafficking was a lucrative business, we learned. Sizeable cash payments were made to local officials who oversaw the border patrols, as well as to the politicians whose decrees made possible the (legal) breakup of families and the subsequent transportation of the girls in a network of "pop-up parties" across North America.

Rumor was, such parties took place only a few miles from us. In the night as we slept in our tidy clean-sheeted beds, child sex slaves our age (and younger) were forced to endure disgusting sex acts in motels on the outskirts of our town on the Delaware River.

Which motels? We thought we knew. On the curving River Road were the 7\$ Motel, Rivervue Motor Court, Holiday Cabins. Some of these derelict hovels were no longer open for regular customers but available for short-term (pop-up) rentals.

In the night. We'd been told.

Rumors that made us shudder, and grate our teeth in disgust. Rumors that made us shiver, and hide our faces in our hands. Rumors that made us sob in disgust, and laugh uncontrollably. Rumors that made us scream into our pillows. Rumors that

bubbled and smoldered like molten earth underfoot where the soil is poisoned by toxic waste—yet when you search for such a place you can't exactly find it.

Though with every fiber of your being you know it exists.

• • •

Rumors that stuck like glue in our guts. Rumors that would not be dislodged. Rumors that excited us, made the hairs at the napes of our necks stir.

Out of such stirrings—Mr. Stickum.

At our table in the school cafeteria, leaning our heads close together so that our long rippling hair mingled. Hot wet palms of our hands smacking the sticky table in frustrated fury. *Disgusting! Perverts!* Gagging sensations, choking our vehement words.

One of us, not the oldest but the most indignant, the one whose father had not long ago abandoned his family—*Dad had another way of expressing it*—seized a ballpoint pen, began sketching in a notebook.

Swine! Deserve their throats cut.

Deserve their peckers cut—off.

Laughing wildly, joyously. Earthy braying laughter, not “feminine,” “girly.” Every other table in the cafeteria dimmed, our table in the corner shone with a radiant light, levitated. For we were the hottest girls, and we were the smartest girls, and we did not give a fuck who hated us for being who we were and not who they wanted us to be.

One of us, pen in hand, rapidly sketched the spiral device to be known as Mr. Stickum as the others leaned over, staring in amazement.

Where was Mr. Stickum coming from? Out of the ballpoint pen? Out of our friend's hand? A small-boned hand, fingernails bitten to the quick. But the deft unerring hand of an artist.

See, here—Mr. Stickum.

• • •

Hours, days of exacting work and coordination required for the ingenious creation.

Deciding upon the material. For girls unaccustomed to making crucial decisions (beyond clothes and shoes we wore to school), this was the great challenge.

What would be most practical for our purposes, we wondered. Not paper, even thick paper. Not cardboard, even thick cardboard. Not wood, even plywood. No. Because the material would have to be resilient, would be required to bend. As the captives struggled, the material would “struggle” with them but must not snap or break. Brittleness must be avoided.

It would have been helpful to ask an older girl for advice. A woman teacher. One of our mothers....

No! Better not.

The fewer who know about Mr. Stickum the better.

Stealthily we rummaged through the basements and attics of our homes where (cast-off, forgotten) things were stored. We did not have enough money among us to make extensive purchases, but we could not find anything quite right for Mr. Stickum as he was imagined in the sketch.

One windy autumn day after school, riding our bicycles to the county landfill three miles away. For much of the trip the headwind slowed us, but the last half-hour was glorious gliding downhill, standing on our pedals like Valkyries with our hair rippling behind us in the wind.

One of you/them might've seen us. That is possible. We like to think so!

How distracted you/they were by the sight of seven girls

on bicycles pedaling single file on the shoulder of the county highway. Coasting downhill exquisitely balanced on pedals.

So distracted you almost turned your vehicle around to follow us....

No. Better not. American girls, white girls, girls with families, might be relatives, friends' children. Can't touch. Not these.

What a surprise, the county landfill! Acres and acres of discarded trash, furniture, kitchen appliances, garbage bags torn open, spillage that stank even in the open air, yet also clothes that looked still wearable. As we tramped about the landfill holding our noses, scavenger birds fluttered upward on wide beating wings. Turkey vultures—were they? (We shrank from their red eyes, cruel hooked beaks fashioned for tearing flesh.) Also crows, smaller and more animated than vultures, though still large enough to seem dangerous to us, cawing and crying at intruders in the trash.

The angry birds beat us back. Still, in our cautious way(s) we persevered.

That first search defeated by sudden rainfall, wind. Hasty retreat.

The second search took us into dusk. Flashlights were required, but the spirit of Mr. Stickum must've smiled upon us: We discovered a fresh mound of debris, including sheets of (scrap) vinyl.

In all, half a dozen sheets of badly discolored vinyl of which not one was entirely whole. But we would need that many at a minimum.

Not easy transporting the clumsy vinyl sheets on our bicycles to a secret place where we could work together—but we managed.

• • •

By this time the original sketch of Mr. Stickum had been enlarged on that thin but tough paper used for architectural drawings (purloined from the home office of one of our fathers). By this time we'd acquired an essential piece of equipment—a powerful staple gun (borrowed from the workshop of one of our fathers who wouldn't miss it—*He hardly goes in the garage these days even if he's home*).

Plan was to create a giant flypaper strip in the shape of—oh, what's it called?

Möbius.

Mö-bius. When there is no end to it, a loop, a spiral, spinning, infinite....

But no, Mr. Stickum was not infinite. With the scrap vinyl stapled together, by the time we were finished, and it did take time, Mr. Stickum measured 23 feet from top to bottom. Finite.

Strictly it was not a true Möbius strip we were creating but rather a pseudo-Möbius strip—according to the one of us who knew more math than the rest of us did. For a true Möbius strip is a two-dimensional surface with length and width but no thickness. *It has only one side.*

The pseudo-Möbius strip to which we gave the appellation Mr. Stickum was identical to a two-dimensional strip—except it existed in three dimensions.

We were anxious that it was supple enough to be given a half twist and that the ends of this (single) strip could be stapled together. Without this crucial feature in the design, Mr. Stickum would not be realized.

Though it sounds easy, it was not easy. Much effort went into the creation of Mr. Stickum in three dimensions.

This was only the start, however. Greater effort came next.

• • •

(We never doubted that Mr. Stickum came somehow out of the

night and yet dwelt within us like a luminous spirit. For we were of that age when an appetite for justice is as fierce as an appetite for food when you are starving.)

(Where were our parents, you are wondering. Our parents were where they'd always been: in our lives yet oblivious of us.)

(Were our parents not aware? Not...suspicious?)

(Very easy to convince them that we were at one another's houses doing homework, having supper, sleepovers.)

(Were our parents somehow not real?)

(Fact is, Mr. Stickum was far more real to us than our parents.)

(No one is less real than parents. A "parent" is a sort of full-body mask that presents itself to you as a complete entity when in fact, as common sense will tell you if you take time to think about it, this "parent" is but a parenthesis in the life of an individual who is essentially a stranger, who lived for many years before you were "born"—who had no idea who you would be, or even that you would exist, for virtually all of those years. Then, when you are "born," this individual employs him-/herself as a "parent" assigned to you for an indeterminate amount of time. The "parent" may be present through all of your life in some cases. Or in some cases the "parent" disappears in time as you become employed as a "parent" yourself, utterly bewildered, perhaps bewitched, but never doubting that you must don your full-body mask in the presence of your child.)

(No, we were not cynical! We were idealists. We never doubted our mission to protect our child sex slave sisters whom we'd never met and would in fact never meet. We never doubted Mr. Stickum, who was hyperreal to us, and always with us, and like a spirit inside us. Like God.)

...

In stealth, in secrecy, by night. In the deserted no-man's-land by the river.

Shuttered factories, mills. Rubble-strewn lots, sites of buildings razed decades ago and their stone foundations open to the night like gaping mouths. Fading signs on tilting fences—NO TRESPASSING, DANGER.

Close by, the rushing river. After a rainfall the water level was high and the hue of mud, bearing with it churning and spinning debris like living things.

Down a weedy incline from the road, hidden from view by

underbrush and small trees, broken brick walls. One of the boarded-up mills, decades ago a ladies' glove factory.... With some effort we forced the door and stepped inside and—here was the space we'd envisioned.

Here, Mr. Stickum was (vertically) established in the shadows of the partially collapsed first floor. Taking care not to plunge through rotted floorboards into the cellar below, we worked with flashlights, for it was dusk and then night. Taking care that our flashlight beams didn't shift upward toward the broken windows and someone driving past on River Road might glance up and see, and wonder what on earth was going on in a deserted factory.

We were short of breath. We began to perspire inside our jeans and pullovers. Nothing in our lives had prepared us for such a challenge, and such a risk. Securing Mr. Stickum to a substantial rafter overhead so that the Möbius strip might hang straight down into the cellar unencumbered. All of us wearing gloves, taking care to protect ourselves as, awkwardly but conscientiously, we applied glue to Mr. Stickum: the strongest glue we could purchase in a hardware store.

There are ordinary glues, including what is called cement glue, and there is epoxy adhesive—strong enough to bind together plastics, wood, metal, human flesh.

In this way, in a succession of nights, working together as a team, we created Mr. Stickum, in design a gigantic (and ingenious) strip of flypaper.

...

Next, we created rumors of pop-up parties on the outskirts of our small town on the Delaware River.

Like wildfire the rumors spread online. A day, and a

night. And another day, and now dusk.

Drawn by the promise of a pop-up party. Drawn by the promise of child sex slaves. A customer would enter the passageway between the brick walls and descend hesitantly, stumbling in the rubble yet determined to achieve his goal. *Hello? Hello? Hello—*

Greeted tantalizingly by glossy cutouts of young girls in short shorts, short skirts, skintight jeans. Younger than we were, 10 to 12 years old with luridly made-up faces, long straight (usually blonde) hair falling past their shoulders.

We mingled with the cutout girls. We wore cat masks with stiff horizontal whiskers. High-heeled boots.

Living girls giggling, tittering. *Yes! You have come to the right address, Mister!*



The men saw, their eyes glared red.

They came individually. They respected one another's privacy. They did not wish (perhaps) to identify another, that they not be identified themselves. All very careful. Not at all reckless. Discreetly they parked their vehicles as far away as they could. Practiced in this sort of deception and not (yet) been made to pay for their crimes.

We were excited. We trembled in expectation. Behind our silken cat masks we stifled our laughter as the first customer came eager and ardent into the shadows of the derelict old factory and was guided through a doorway, a step down ("Mind the gap, sir")—a sudden fall, a cry of alarm—and within seconds secured to Mr. Stickum.

Flailing to escape Mr. Stickum, whose gluey surface caught their hair and their struggling hands and bodies. At first incredulous—*What is this? What?*—trying desperately to pull away, pushing and shoving against Mr. Stickum, who only seized them more securely in his grip.

W-What is this? What can this be? Gigantic strip of fly-paper upon which the predator thrashes, beats his arms like flies' wings beating in desperation only to bind faster, more

But it had been too late for Mr. McCreery as soon as he stepped across the threshold and into the pop-up place.

Piteously screaming, begging—*Help! Help me! What is this? No!*

We laughed in derision. Might've been tickled by rough daddy fingers, how we laughed. Howled. Recalling how, in fact, yes, years ago, Mr. McCreery had tickled our ribs and we'd squirmed to escape and never said a word.

The next shock, the next night, a man whose picture was often in the newspaper, a local politician on the town council—Mr. Steinhauer.

He was furious, thrashed so hard, plunged and lunged at us cursing, that he came close to detaching himself from Mr. Stickum by sheer force—but in the end the powerful glue held fast and he was rendered helpless as a fly.

The next shock, Dora's uncle.

And there would be several other shocks: dads, uncles, cousins. Neighbors. Teachers.

Our town was a small town. We'd had to realize that some of the customers/captives might be known to us, but still you do not truly expect to see the face of a man you know well, a man in your

WE TREMBLED IN EXPECTATION. BEHIND OUR SILKEN CAT MASKS WE STIFLED OUR LAUGHTER.

securely in the glue.

Crying for help. Writhing, convulsing.

The first customers were middle-aged males, unfamiliar faces. Then a familiar face—contorted, terrified, yet somehow familiar—someone we believed we'd seen in town, or somewhere, whose name we did not know. But then—on the third night—Mr. Perry! We were shocked. We were stunned. We could not speak at first, for Mr. Perry was one of the teachers at our high school, who taught driver's education and boys' gym and coached the girls' track team....

But we recovered. We kept our distance, detachment. We were excited, we trembled with dread of what we'd unleashed. We did not take pity on Mr. Perry, who was stuck on Mr. Stickum practically upside-down, a foolish figure, kicking, flailing his forearms, face flushed with blood, eyes virtually popping from his face.

Help me! Help me! But there was no help.

On the following night our first customer was also known to us, and even more shocking—Mr. McCreery.

Oh, this was awful! Ceci's father, whom some of us thought we'd known very well.

Behind her cat mask Ceci was very still. We could hear her breathing, we could feel the pain of her heartbeat.

Taking no note, not staring after her as Ceci slipped away into the night, mortified with shame.

own family.... You do not expect such a man to be a sex pervert.

Behind our masks, hot tears streaked our faces.

Tears of sorrow, rage. Tears of humiliation.

But no one forced these men to come prowling in the night for child sex slaves.

Ceci returned to us, for Ceci understood. In her household there was a gaping absence. No one knew where Mr. McCreery had gone (except Ceci, who grieved with the others). Mr. McCreery's car was found in the parking lot of the old train depot a mile from the river, locked.

The train depot was no longer in operation, for trains no longer stopped in our town. But there was a bus stop nearby, and so it came to be believed that Mr. McCreery had taken a bus and in this way vanished—though no one could remember a man of his description boarding the bus at the time he was believed to have departed.

Fascinating to us how each of the customers/captives generated a (plausible) narrative in his wake and in each case it was believed that the man had left of his own volition and not as a consequence of "foul play."

A sweet sort of knowledge, to know that what others adamantly believe or wish to believe is mistaken and to have not the slightest impulse to correct them.

Having no mercy too was sweet to us.

For always it is expected of girls, as of women, that we will be

loving, forgiving, merciful. But Mr. Stickum has taught us that that has been a mistake of our sex.

• • •

We took pictures of the captured perverts on our iPhones. We recorded their howls of rage, pain. Their pleas.

These were just to share with one another. We deleted all evidence within hours. We were not so foolish as to risk being caught.

What we recall most vividly of those fevered nights: the way we moved secure and swaggering in our masks and high-heeled boots along the rafters of the derelict old factory. Sure-footed as actual cats.

Safe behind the masks, gazing down at our pathetic captives strung below us on the vinyl flypaper. Laughing to see how their agitations made the strip turn jerkily, as in a parody of a dance. How certain of the captives were so frantic to escape they tore off swaths of skin, leaving raw flesh oozing and dripping blood, but still they could not fully free themselves from Mr. Stickum's lethal glue.

The most pitiful, one or two captives who'd managed to free all but their heads and were hanging by their hair, in terrible agony.

Bleating, braying, whimpering, murmuring—*Help me! Let me out of here! I will pay you....*

Pleading with us as we passed just out of range of their flailing hands.

One of us said—*Someone should put him out of his misery.*

Another said, mishearing—*No mercy! Not for these perverts.*

Several captives became berserk, their brains boiled, convulsing, frothing at their mouths. Others suffered heart attacks or strokes and hung limp and lifeless like giant flies whose wings have stilled. One comical fellow managed to strangle himself, having twisted his body around like a pretzel in his zeal to escape the embrace of Mr. Stickum.

It goes without saying all the captives soiled themselves. Not the most disgusting thing about the perverts, but yes, disgusting to our sensitive nostrils.

However, we made no effort to clean their messes. In the grimy cellar of the glove factory, more filth did not matter.

• • •

With time we grew more experienced. You might say crueler.

Our capacity for surprise, for shock diminished as each of us had been surprised, shocked more than once by who turned up writhing and whimpering on Mr. Stickum.

One of the perverts called to me, in his distraught state barely able to speak, head downward, limbs askew as in a crucifixion, tears glistening on a pasty-pale face—*Help me, I am begging you. I'm not a bad man. I have a family, I have daughters.... I am in such pain! Oh God, please....*

In panic I thought: *He knows me!* But he never uttered my name.

He could see only the cat mask. He could see only the eyes in the cat mask. He could not see me.

I walked away trembling, where I couldn't hear his pleas. But I walked away.

Soon we lost track of how many were stuck on Mr. Stickum. The pleasure of observing them, counting them, taking pictures on our iPhones and recording their cries of misery began gradually to fade.

Success is like stuffing your belly. Hunger fades to nausea.

And so after a few weeks we decided to remove all notices of the pop-up parties from the internet. Our "virtual" identities vanished. Our chat-room friendships came to abrupt ends. Fewer customers were showing up to stumble and fall onto Mr. Stickum, and one night no one came at all. Hard to say if we were

relieved or disappointed. Though this was good news—of course.

All the sex perverts in the vicinity are now prisoners of Mr. Stickum and can harm no one else.

We wanted to think this. We didn't want to think that local perverts had simply become more vigilant and did not wish to take a chance on a pop-up party at a time when a number of men in the area had "vanished."

We debated what to do with the captives who did not (yet) appear to be dead. At first we'd feared that their howls of rage, fear, distress would draw attention, but the deserted glove factory was far enough from town that no one heard. And the murmurous sound of the nearby rushing river muffled the noise.

We never fed the captives, never gave them so much as a paper cup of water. It was not just that we were heartless—we were cautious, and wise: To come too close to the desperate would be to become trapped in their desperation. Especially we feared the slightest touch of Mr. Stickum—we knew that would be lethal.

If we abandoned the factory, our captives would die—eventually—of thirst and starvation, which seemed to us a (relatively) painless death considering their depravity and the wickedness in their hearts. In time, their befouled bodies would be devoured by scavengers—turkey vultures, rodents, insects. In time, their skeletons would fall into the murky cellar. Their bones would mix together as in a common grave.

On the last evening we returned to the factory it was to discover that every captive was dead! Their bodies hung limp and lifeless from the gigantic flypaper strip, streaked with something dark—blood? In the blackness, slow dull dripping sounds.

Someone had surreptitiously slashed the captives' throats. One of us, we had to suppose. But which one?

We never knew. At least I never knew.

She'd succumbed to mercy, whichever of us it was. For slashing the throats of perverts was a merciful, kindly act. A gesture that must have involved a good deal of effort from one unaccustomed to wielding a razor-sharp butcher knife, let alone wholesale slaughter.

Hastily we departed from the factory and never returned.

We have no photos of Mr. Stickum. We have not even the original plans, sketched in a fever of inspiration in our school cafeteria.

All evidence linking us to Mr. Stickum was destroyed.

All of us remained friends—that is, we remain friends. Our bond is Mr. Stickum, though we never utter his name or include it in any e-mail or text message.

We all went away to college. We were good students; in the wake of Mr. Stickum, we were mature and self-reliant students who did not have to be urged by parents or teachers to excel.

Eventually, we suppose, the deserted glove factory will be razed and a mound of skeletons discovered in its cellar—but that has not happened yet. The same old derelict buildings remain on the river behind semi-collapsed wire fences that warn NO TRESPASSING, DANGER.

Most of us return to visit our families several times a year. We were always dutiful daughters and we are scarcely less dutiful now. We lie in bed in the night in our former rooms, with at least one window open. Some of us lie sleepless beside deep-sleeping husbands, awake and alert and suffused with yearning for the time of Mr. Stickum that has faded from our lives. But if we listen closely we can hear faint cries borne on the wind from miles away—*Help me! Please help me....*

Nothing sweeter than falling asleep to the beautiful music of sorrow, heartrending pleas in strange languages. The wind, the rippling churning river, the cries of the damned. ■



THE LONG ROAD TO PRESIDENT PETE

He has captivated millions despite no national governing experience, vague policy positions and zero Twitter feuds with the president. Can Mayor Pete sustain his momentum through debate season?

BY ALEX THOMAS

Nine days before Pete Buttigieg officially declared his bid for the White House, a woman approached the South Bend, Indiana mayor as he was waiting to board a flight to Manchester, New Hampshire, his third trip to the state since announcing his presidential exploratory committee in January. “She said, ‘Everyone’s coming up to you and saying hello,’” Buttigieg tells *PLAYBOY*. “And I said, ‘Well, yeah, it’s campaign season.’ She said, ‘Oh, what channel are you a reporter for?’”

He says that the encounter had been “a reminder that there are lots of people we need to reach—and also that we need to make sure this is a project of substance. Substance is key to outliving the flavor-of-the-month period.”

Buttigieg’s campaign raised an impressive \$7 million in the first quarter of 2019, bolstered by a March town hall on CNN that resulted in more than 22,000 donations within 24 hours. Soon after, Buttigieg’s team was negotiating a televised town hall with Fox News, perhaps because that woman at the airport watches Fox News. Indeed, if she watched any other network—MSNBC at night, whoever airs *Ellen* during the day, CNN at any hour—she would have recognized the 37-year-old who has become the most unexpected and fascinating candidate in the 2020 contest.

This June, at the first Democratic primary debate in Miami, Buttigieg is expected to cross swords with as many as 19 competitors. Millions will tune in. Should he perform mildly well, anyone faintly interested in politics will know Mayor Pete’s last name—and, finally, how to pronounce its trio of syllables. (It’s *boot-edge-edge*.) Should he perform above average, he could wipe out half the field overnight. Buttigieg knows this is the advantage his rising-star status offers.

“The only point of doing this, especially coming from an under-

dog position, is thinking that you’re going to introduce ideas that need to be there,” he says. “If we continue to perform, the debates could be a very good environment, because it will be just that many more people watching—hopefully people who will have the same response as people who tuned in earlier.”

The whispered problem is that two months before the debates, Buttigieg had yet to publish any official policy position on his website. He has instead spent his time doubling down on selling his campaign as grassroots, likely to temper the ascent that has propelled him to the near-front of the pack as the first millennial presidential candidate.

“You’ll continue to see us in every corner of the country, with an emphasis on the early states, because for a grassroots, underdog project like ours, that’s where you have the best chances at exceeding expectations,” he says. “The beautiful thing about this process is that a janitor in Iowa may have as much to offer a candidate as a senator from somewhere else.”

Buttigieg admits he’s been surprised by the “dizzying” pace of campaigning. While other candidates’ teams have launched strong operations in early voting states like Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina, his has remained shoestring. On his third visit to New Hampshire, for example, Buttigieg had only one paid staffer in the state, according to his campaign spokesperson, longtime Democratic strategist Lis Smith. It’s an endearing quality, but it’s not at all sustainable.

For now, “the most important thing is not to get caught up in your own coverage,” Buttigieg tells me during a tight 45-minute interview at a small café in Manchester—the largest city in the state, which hosts an early primary election. The night before, he sold out a trendy wine bar in Washington, D.C. where

Right: Buttigieg addresses black voters at the National Action Network convention in April, saying, “An agenda for black Americans needs to include home ownership, entrepreneurship, education, health and justice.” **Below:** Buttigieg on the trail in Indiana.



ticket prices ranged from \$25 to \$1,000. Here in Manchester, his campaign scrambled to move from a brewery to an art museum to accommodate a larger than expected turnout. At both of these appearances, the overwhelming show of support felt both worrisome and obvious. Buttigieg’s campaign seemed unprepared. He did not.

After first-quarter fund-raising numbers ranked Buttigieg fourth behind Bernie Sanders, Kamala Harris and Beto O’Rourke—and a trio of polls ranked him third behind Joe Biden and Sanders—everyone simultaneously seemed to realize that the mayor of Indiana’s fourth-largest city was a legitimate candidate. But as Hillary Clinton can attest, poll results can be everything from misleading to flat-out incorrect.

“I don’t expect to learn that much from the polls in the next three months other than gathering validation of our name recognition,” he says. “We need to not be reactive but prospective. You’re not competing against any one candidate or combination of candidates. You’re competing against the house.”

The house includes a roster of well-qualified progressive senators who have been billed as the Democrats’ saviors since 2016 but who continue to blur in popularity and in and out of the media’s attention span. To say the Democrats’ united front is buckling would be an understatement. D.C. insiders know the road to winning the nomination will be a bloodbath. There is no clear front-runner. But that’s why the mayor has been able to stand out.

Much ink has been spilled about Buttigieg’s credentials, but let’s rehash it for posterity’s sake. He is the first openly gay Democrat to seek the White House but has no interest in selling himself as the LGBTQ candidate. He served in Afghanistan as a Navy Reserve intelligence officer but isn’t promoting himself as a hawk. He went to Harvard and became a Rhodes scholar, but he does not brag about either high honor in prepared remarks. His time at McKinsey, a top management consulting firm that draws the ire of progressives, is muted throughout his campaign.

Instead, he frequently reminds crowds that he is the mayor of a

city in flyover country—a relatively scandal-free city that he describes as “the exact kind of geography the Democratic Party has struggled to be connected with. The South Bend story is such an important part of what I have to say about America. We’re not a wealthy, homogenous, tidy college town; we’re a diverse community with a complex industrial past. All of us have a mix of advantage and disadvantage in our story.”

A version of that line has been delivered not once, not twice, but ad nauseam. In Manchester it was repeated across two speeches—once to those inside the art museum and a second time to those stuck in the parking lot. Outside, when crowds began to grumble about having reserved useless tickets, one man loudly complained, “I’m curious what the point was having everyone sign up ahead of time. They want you on the mailing list is what it is. Great way to lose a voter.” Then Buttigieg popped up on a bench and started proselytizing—a jab at Beto O’Rourke. “I’ve heard that the way to ingratiate yourself to voters is to stand on things,” he quipped.

The next day, Buttigieg held an event in Concord, this time in a bookstore. It was a fraught venue that filled quickly, with the temperature rising to an uncomfortable level. Most in attendance couldn’t see the candidate. All they could hear was Buttigieg’s voice, noticeable for its youth. It wasn’t freighted with the gravelly rumble of Biden or Sanders. It carried none of the condescension of the establishment. It was his alone.

• • •

Buttigieg really came onto the national stage two years ago, in 2017, when he launched a bid for chair of the Democratic National Committee. The committee was wounded after the 2016 election fractured the party; Buttigieg thought he could put Humpty Dumpty together again. He ultimately dropped out of the race, but he did elevate himself as a national figure, and the political class studied up on his biography.

As he began to test the viability of his presidential ambition, New York media fixture Molly Jong-Fast hosted an intimate meet-and-greet that included BuzzFeed editor in chief Ben Smith and actor Zak Orth. She tells me the Midwestern mayor excites her because “he’s the opposite of Donald Trump in every aspect of his life and policy. He chose to fight in the war; Trump was a draft dodger. He is on the young side; Trump is on the old side. He learned Norwegian to read a book; Trump has never read a book. Religion is important to him; religion is not important to Trump.” According to Jong-Fast, the crowd of some 50 influentials was nothing short of blown away by the long-shot candidate’s résumé.

As mayor of South Bend since 2012, Buttigieg has suffered

“I HAVE A LOT OF PARKS AND REC MOMENTS.”

only one major scandal, known around town as “the police tapes case.” Just before he took office, someone discovered that the South Bend police chief had been secretly recording internal phone calls. Some of the tapes allegedly caught white cops making racist remarks, including about the chief himself, who is black. The incident led Buttigieg to dismiss the chief, whom he describes in his book, 2019’s *Shortest Way Home*, as “well-liked,” while no action was taken against the white cops. At press time, the tapes had not been released, their fate tied up in state court. Buttigieg says he hasn’t heard the recordings. The lawsuits have cost South Bend taxpayers nearly \$2 million, according to the *South Bend Tribune*.

Today Buttigieg presents that scandal as “an opportunity to explain how much I have learned the hard way about the importance of these issues...some of the questions of trust and the relationship between policing and communities and color.” Roughly a quarter of South Bend’s population is black.

During his first term he also launched an initiative to knock down or fix up 1,000 vacant houses in 1,000 days. Some locals claim the plan was blatant gentrification disguised as social good. Regina Williams-Preston, who lived in one of the affected neighborhoods, is now running for Buttigieg’s seat in City Hall. And in 2015, he remarked that “all lives matter,” though he has since apologized for that phrasing—which has been used to dismiss police brutality in black communities—claiming he didn’t understand it at the time.

Currently, none of these missteps have marred Buttigieg at the national level, but if he hopes to push past Trump in the general election, he’ll need to prove to communities of color he’s worth voting for. Although the number of eligible millennial voters is on track to nearly outnumber baby boomers for the first time in history, the 2016 election saw black turnout at the polls decrease for the first time in 20 years, according to the Pew Research Center. A proven utterance of “all lives matter”? Once Democrats

start playing dirty, that line may prove to be gold for any opponent looking to own the black vote.

...

In Manchester, Buttigieg shakes a long line of hands and fields questions from supporters. A pair of teachers ask him to say hello to their classroom on their iPhones, and a former marine, followed by a young woman, asks if he’ll support student voting rights. Another man in line doesn’t want a photo; he uses his time to ask Buttigieg if he’ll consider doubling NASA’s budget. Somebody shakes his hand and tells him, “You’re my son’s age.”

After the museum empties, his team heads back to the brewery. Buttigieg looks like any politician after a relentless day of campaigning. His sleeves are scrunched up to his elbows, the lines on his face deeper than they were in the morning. Somebody hands him a root beer in a glass bottle, and I mention how the wide field of questions mirrors a scene from *Parks and Recreation*. Buttigieg nods. “I have a lot of *Parks and Rec* moments,” he says.

While most of the candidates have singled out the president in their primary campaigns, Buttigieg asserts that Trump isn’t worth his energy, at least not yet. When asked about the president’s tendency to govern by signing stacks of executive orders, Buttigieg says he is “more interested in our agenda than his agenda.” He does have a simile for the president, though, saying 45 “almost became like a computer virus that breaks a computer by tying up all its processing power. That’s kind of what’s happening to the media with this president. I’m interested in changing the channel, and it will take a lot of discipline to do that. But,” he adds, “that’s the project, not just to punch back—which you have to do sometimes—but to get people thinking differently.”

In a rare move for a presidential hopeful, Buttigieg has sparred openly with the vice president, who was governor of Indiana during Buttigieg’s first term as mayor and the early part of his second term. More important, Mike Pence was governor when Buttigieg came out to his constituents, in 2015. In his book,



Left: Buttigieg kicks off his run in South Bend. **Below:** Mayor Pete fan Genevieve Coursey at a Manchester town hall. According to the Pew Research Center, 37 percent of eligible voters in 2020 will be 18 to 39 years old.



Buttigieg writes that “Pence’s fanaticism was hard to overlook, knowing how it had impacted me as a mayor—and as a person.” As governor, Pence signed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which allowed businesses to deny service to LGBTQ customers and was so disastrous that the state later hired a public relations firm to try to repair its image.

Pence is a useful villain for Buttigieg. He’s not any more well-liked than Trump (at press time, RealClearPolitics put Trump’s favorability at 42.6 percent; Pence’s hovers at 40 percent), and because of their at-odds history in Indiana, it’s hard to accuse Buttigieg of sketching an adversary to boost his credibility. At another event in early April, Buttigieg told a crowd, “That’s the thing I wish the Mike Pences of the world would understand: If you’ve got a problem with who I am, your problem is not with me; your quarrel, sir, is with my creator.” (Pence declined *PLAYBOY*’s request for comment.)

When I ask if he believes that legislating morality, and thus social conservatism, has become more prominent under the Trump administration, Buttigieg says, “I think the president made a fairly cynical decision to align himself with the evangelical right because that was necessary to bring him to power.”

• • •

Buttigieg has no choice but to play up his youth—he’s the same age as Ivanka Trump—but as his popularity has surged, he has had to work harder to articulate what he stands for lest he get boxed in as that guy who could be our “first young president.” He tells me he’s “most interested in launching legislation” and that “bad policies will need to be replaced. The question is what are we going to replace them with.” It’s a good question, and it feels strange to think Mayor Pete is running for president without answers.

His “concerns” (at press time, they had not been dictated as official positions) include promoting national service; investing in public education and increasing resources and compensation for public school teachers; reducing barriers to college education; overhauling the Pell Grant program; creating alternative pathways to success for young people who do not attend college; securing a woman’s right to choose; and “structural reform” to the U.S. government, including abolishing the electoral college and expanding the Supreme Court.

To suggest that any of these topics aren’t millennial at heart would be foolish. Despite his Ivy League pedigree, Buttigieg’s experiences are typical of his generation. He supports abolishing the electoral college, for example, because twice in his lifetime a

Democratic candidate has won the popular vote but lost the general election. He grew up when text messaging took off and was in college on September 11, 2001. He had a MySpace account and attended Harvard when Mark Zuckerberg created Facebook. He met his husband, Chasten, who teaches junior high school theater in Indiana, on the dating app Hinge. His dogs, Buddy and Truman, are famous on Twitter.

Although he’s nearly a decade younger than the skateboarding, punk-rock Beto O’Rourke, Buttigieg’s youth feels different. He’s passionate without being eager, measured without seeming desperate to be liked. His political icons are neither surprising nor contentious. At the age of 18 he wrote an essay praising Sanders, then a congressman, which he closed with the following: “I have heard that no sensible young person today would want to give his or her life to public service. I can personally assure you this is untrue.”

When asked about his political influences, Buttigieg reaches back further. “The JFK presidency,” he says, “was one that I thought was important and compelling, because you had somebody who was motivated by this desire to serve, who had a contagious desire to serve.” He seems to allude to similarities between himself and Kennedy, saying, “You had somebody with a good popular touch but not afraid to be intellectual and, very significantly, somebody who had a generational appeal that was really powerful.”

The Kennedy comparison hasn’t been made much by the media—perhaps because we have compared one too many politicians to JFK and have learned our lesson. But Buttigieg is arguably the most Kennedyesque candidate in a field of 20. Kennedy remains our nation’s second-youngest president; Buttigieg would be our youngest. Kennedy made history as the first Catholic president; Buttigieg would be our first openly gay president. More than anything, Kennedy had an endearing quality. You wanted to be around the man and felt you were a part of something by supporting him. Buttigieg’s supporters seem to have a similar fixation. Several long months lie between this paltry Kennedy comparison and the ballot box, but Buttigieg looks as good as anybody in the race. And after the debates, we may finally have a front-runner. ■



"You need to ask yourself, Does the Clitorizer 3000 still spark joy?"



In Her Element

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
WISSA



AUGUST PLAYMATE

Obviously, this is who we are.
This is our lived experience. It's
not up for debate.



August Playmate
Geena Rocero finds powerful
communion in Costa Rica's
towering trees and teeming tides

I'm in the Costa Rican jungle. I'm nude, playing in the sand, climbing trees, and at one with nature. I'm in my element. It's a perfect metaphor for the dream of trans people and the way our bodies should always be seen: as natural as can be.

I come from a strict Catholic upbringing in the Philippines—the only place in the world besides Vatican City where divorce is illegal, but also a place where transgender beauty pageants are broadcast on national television. As a kid I would see the women in these pageants and recognize myself through them. They expanded my vision of who I could be and gave me a pathway to reach for my bigger dreams. Little did I know that at the age of 15 I myself would become a transgender beauty queen.

I moved to the United States when I was 17. Just imagine: an immigrant, a young trans girl trying to grapple with her identity and then with a new culture and a language barrier. It was a complete shock. When I started modeling I began to realize the power in loving my body. I was doing a lot of lingerie and swimsuit editorials, projecting an image of a



powerful woman in touch with her sexuality. But after eight years I started to feel a sense of shame, and the pressure of withholding the truth became insurmountable. The bigger the job, the bigger the paranoia that I would be outed. The stress of living this double life actually caused me to break out with eczema. I needed to listen to my body. I knew that if I was going to tell my story, it had to be on the biggest platform I could think of: the TED conference. So that was my first public speaking engagement!

My TED talk went viral. It was 2014, the beginning of a big shift in the cultural conversation about transgender people. I wanted to further that conversation, so I launched an advocacy platform called Gender Proud. This allowed me to travel the world for transgender rights—specifically gender recognition laws, which would allow trans and nonconforming people to change their names and gender markers on legal documents. After a year and a half of policy work, I started a production company. Working with VH1, MTV, LogoTV, Fusion and Univision, I became, I guess, a transgender Tyra Banks, because I believe telling stories through the lens of the transgender experience speaks louder than statistics.

For so long we trans people have not been in charge of our own stories, and our representation has been predicated on the idea that we're not the people we are. Obviously, this is who we are. This is our lived experience. It's not up for debate.











DATA SHEET



BIRTHPLACE: Manila, Philippines **CURRENT RESIDENCE:** New York, New York

ON ROLE MODELS

I remember looking at Caroline “Tula” Cossey—one of the first transgender supermodels, who was actually featured in *PLAYBOY*—and thinking, Wow, if she could do it, maybe I can as well. I wanted to be as sexy, beautiful and confident as she was.

ON DESTINY

We spoke English in the Philippines, but when I moved to the United States at 17 and started hanging out with other teenagers, it was a totally different culture. I remember my gay best friend telling me, “Girl, we’re going to listen to Destiny’s Child. You’re going to learn young slang.” Obviously we listened to a *lot* of Destiny’s Child, and we loved it.

ON POWER AND PLEASURE

In my process of self-development, I read *Think and Grow Rich* by Napo-

leon Hill. He writes, “The emotion of sex brings into being a state of mind.” The book taught me about the power of self-determined pleasure—and that completely revolutionized my relationship to power and sexuality.

ON CHAMPIONS

Freddie Mercury is my jam. I became obsessed with him after seeing *Bohemian Rhapsody*. I’m just in love with his beautiful spirit. I also love listening to Filipina hip-hop artist Ruby Ibarra. Her song “Us” is an empowering feminist anthem.

ON HIDDEN TALENTS

I become really crafty when I’m on a remote island and have nothing to do. My favorite thing is to make swimsuits out of natural materials, whether it’s leaves or fruits. I’ll put together the heart of a banana leaf and turn it into a red two-piece bikini.

ON GOOD ADVICE

I once shared a speaking agent with the iconic goddess Maya Angelou, and he told me Maya believed the true definition of *legacy* is not about the future; it’s about the people you interact with day to day. The moment you become conscious of who you are and what your purpose is and the way you communicate that to people one at a time, that’s your legacy.

ON FOOD

I love cooking. I mean, find me in the kitchen, girl. I like cooking Filipino and Italian food; it’s like meditation for me. Of course, I can make a mean chicken adobo with my eyes closed.

ON FEMINISM

If feminism doesn’t include the journey and spectrum of trans womanhood, I don’t want to be part of it. I’m an advocate for transfeminism!

Geena Rocero





AUGUST 2019 PLAYMATE





Mindy Spin



GIVE ME

MORE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
**CHARLOTTE
RUTHERFORD**

The democratization of consent. The freedom to communicate what you want to do or what you want done to you. The art of lying back, letting go and edging closer to getting off. Do you feel that? Do you like it? Do you want more? Feel it tingle, taunt, touch and take you into another universe.

This euphoria is deeply interwoven in the acts of BDSM (bondage, discipline, sadism and masochism), the craft of making sex as compassionate and consensual as it is captivating. If we want to become a truly sex-positive society, we need to engage with one of the few sexual subcultures that take sex positivity seriously.

“We—especially men—have been socially conditioned to avoid pain and submission,” explains Domina Colette Pervette, a San Francisco-based dominatrix. “But the lines between pain and pleasure begin to blur in the state of heightened arousal.”

The conflation of BDSM with perversion remains the biggest misconception the practice faces. Strange, given that one must be an excellent communicator to partake in kink; if you can’t talk about it, you aren’t ready to be blindfolded, whipped, chained or cuffed. “There are no assumptions in BDSM. Everything has to be negotiated,” says Pervette.

“The first hour is all about communication,” says Argent Lloyd of his practice of *shibari*, the art of Japanese rope bondage. “I want to share this space with you, and you’re giving me permission to put my hands on you.”

Despite the BDSM community’s history of promoting respect between partners, practitioners have often been thrown into the same bucket as predators. Until 2013, the practice of BDSM was classified as a disorder in the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*—alongside pedophilia and bestiality.

Susan Wright, founder of the National Coalition for Sexual Freedom, works to change how the mental health community understands kink. “So much of what we focus on is educating professionals. They are the gatekeepers,” she says. According to Wright, in 2008, 124 parents approached the organization because their BDSM preferences were being used against them in family court. After the NCSF successfully campaigned for clinicians to update the *DSM*, that number had dropped to 20 parents by 2018.

What’s most backward about kink-shaming is how much the vanilla could learn from the kinky. Lucky for us, appreciators of kink are coming out of the closet. This includes celebrity ambassadors: Adam Rippon wore a leather harness to the 2018 Academy Awards; Michael B. Jordan and Timothée Chalamet followed. This isn’t an E.L. James fantasy; this is reality. And our world needs it. “People often forget that BDSM is just another way of connecting with someone,” says Pervette. “How we as a culture accept BDSM is indicative of how open we are to the expression of sexual freedom overall.”

PULLING BACK THE CURTAIN ON THE BEAUTIES OF BDSM

BY ANITA LITTLE





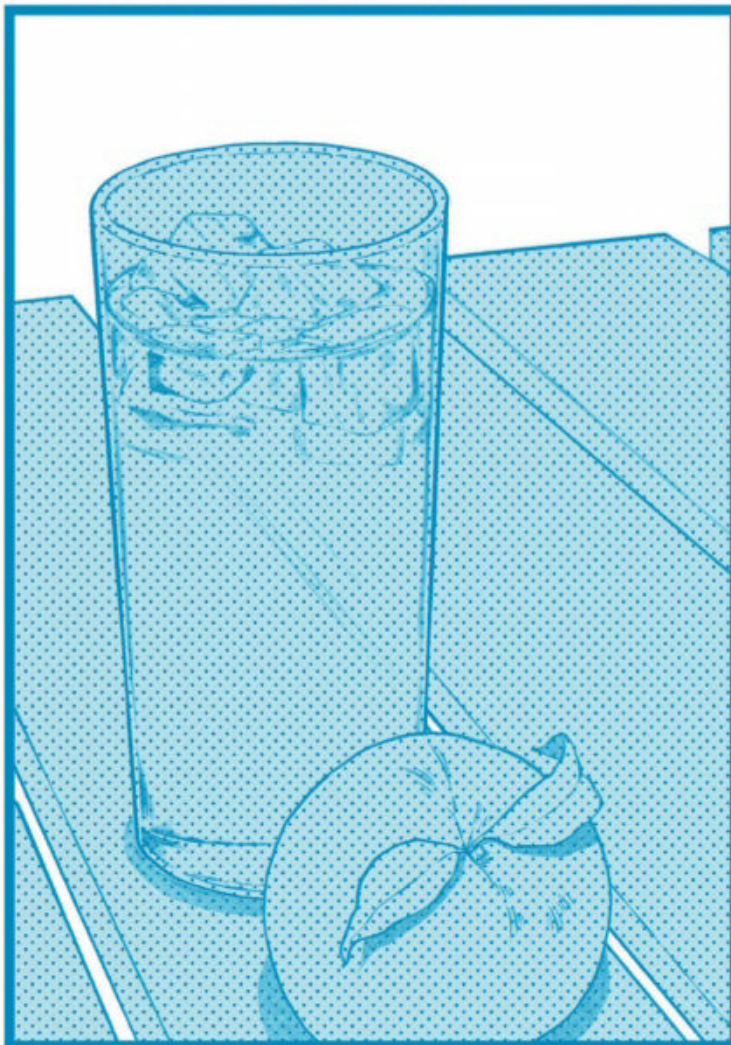
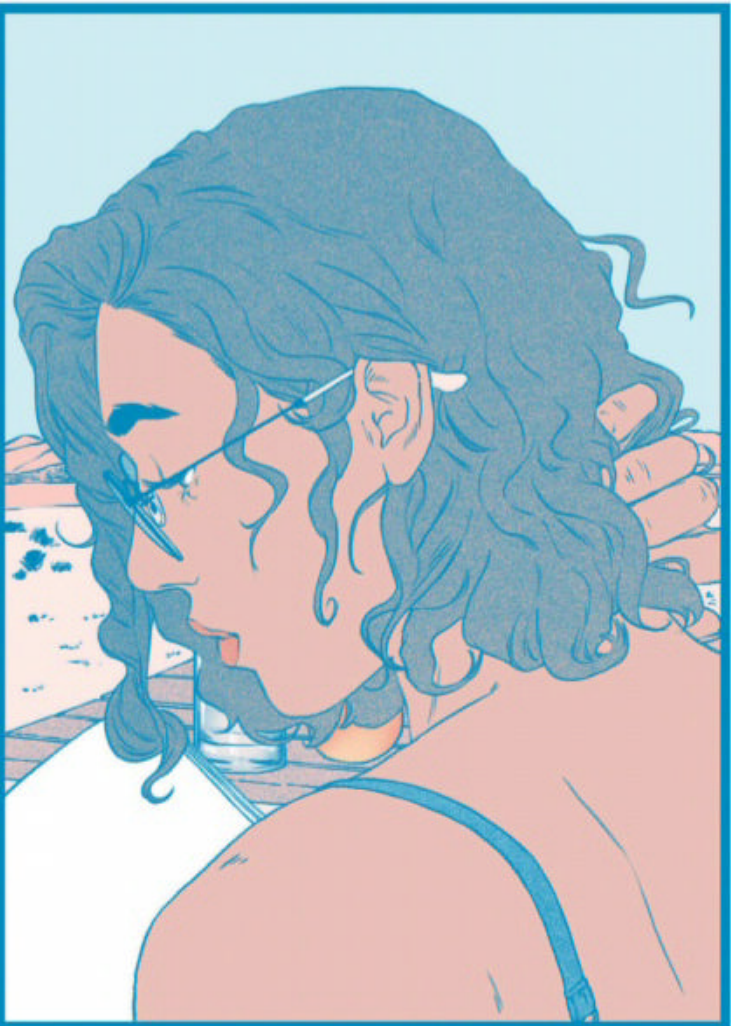
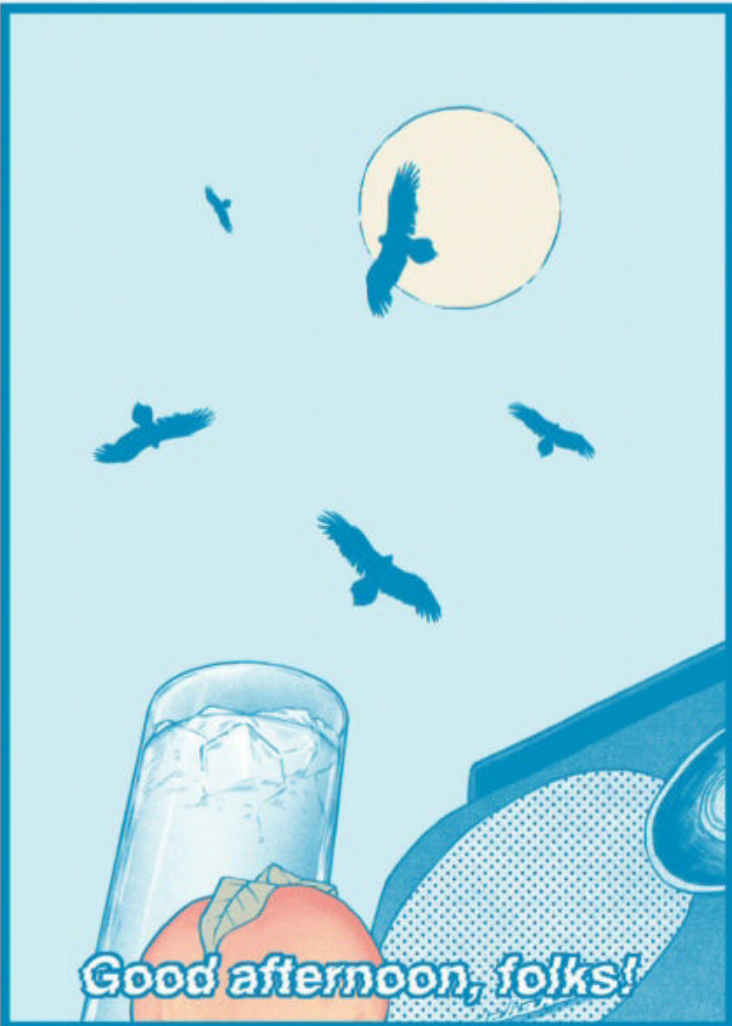
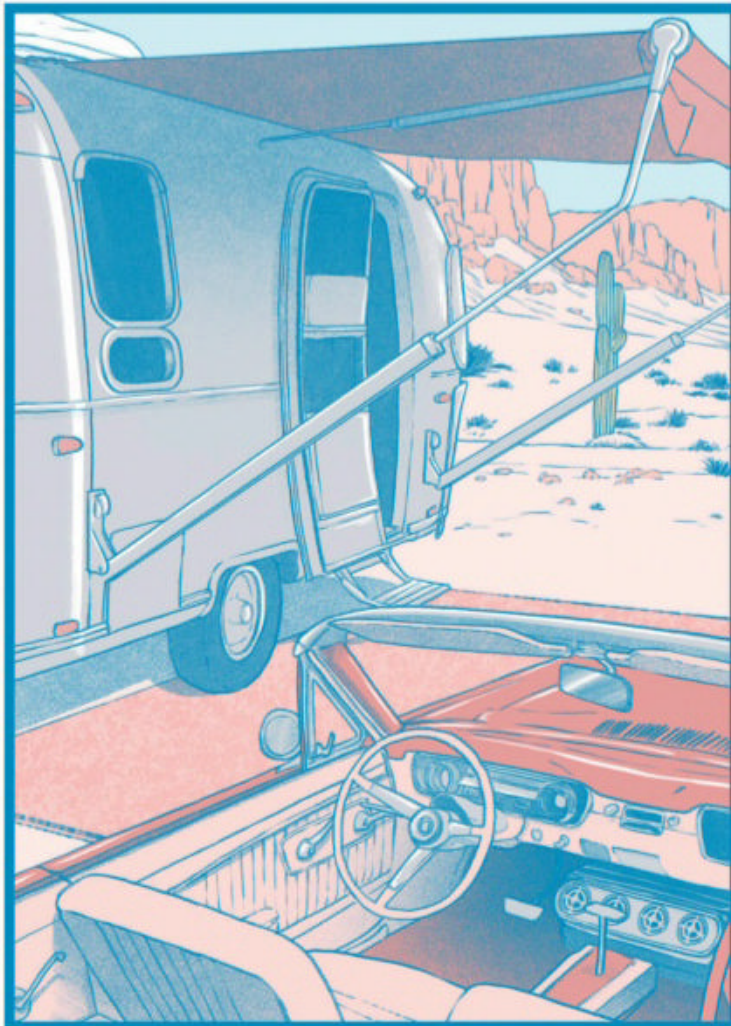


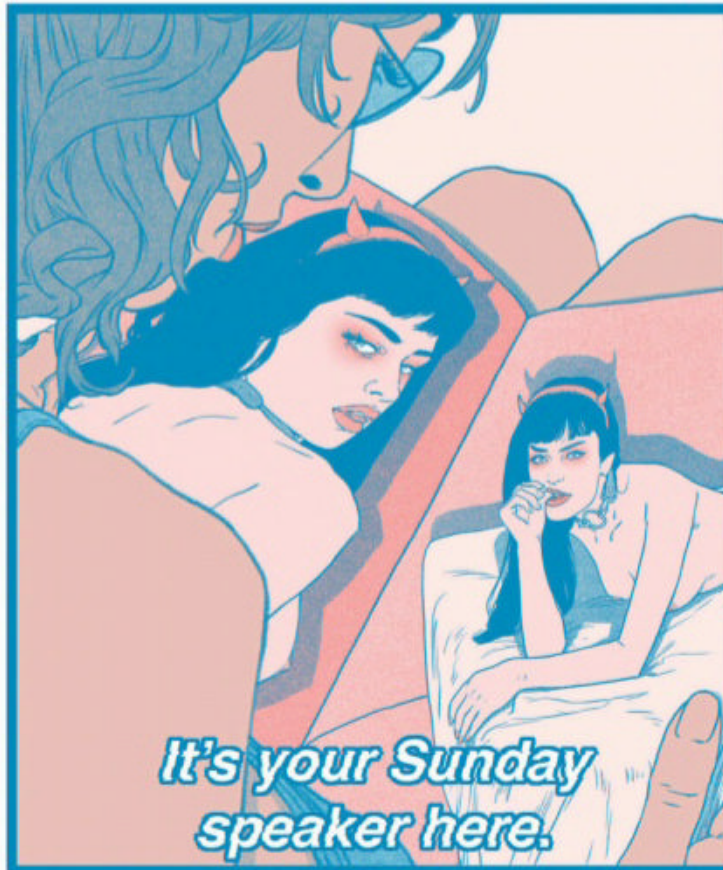
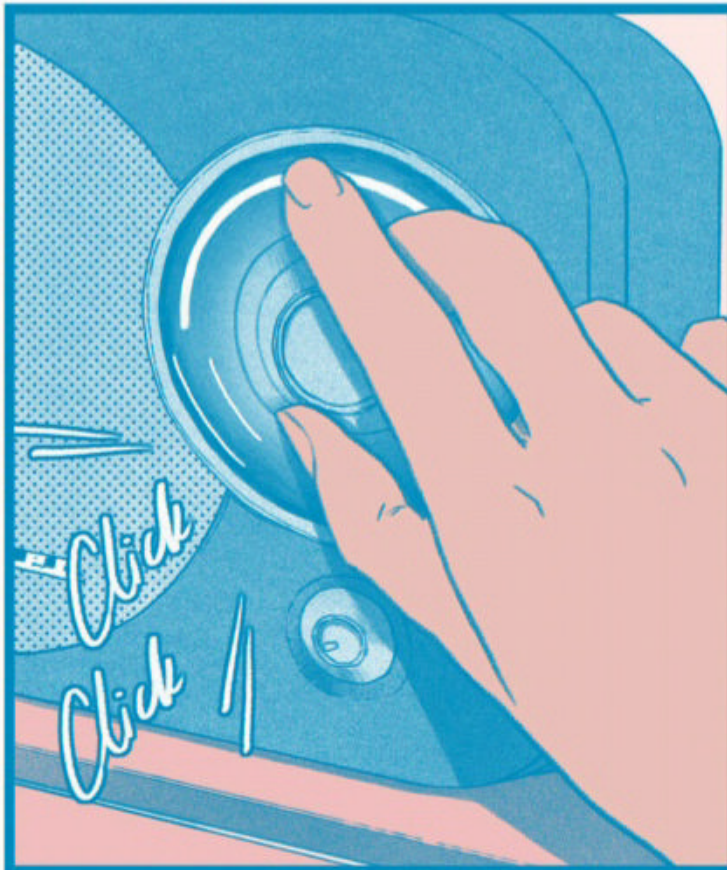


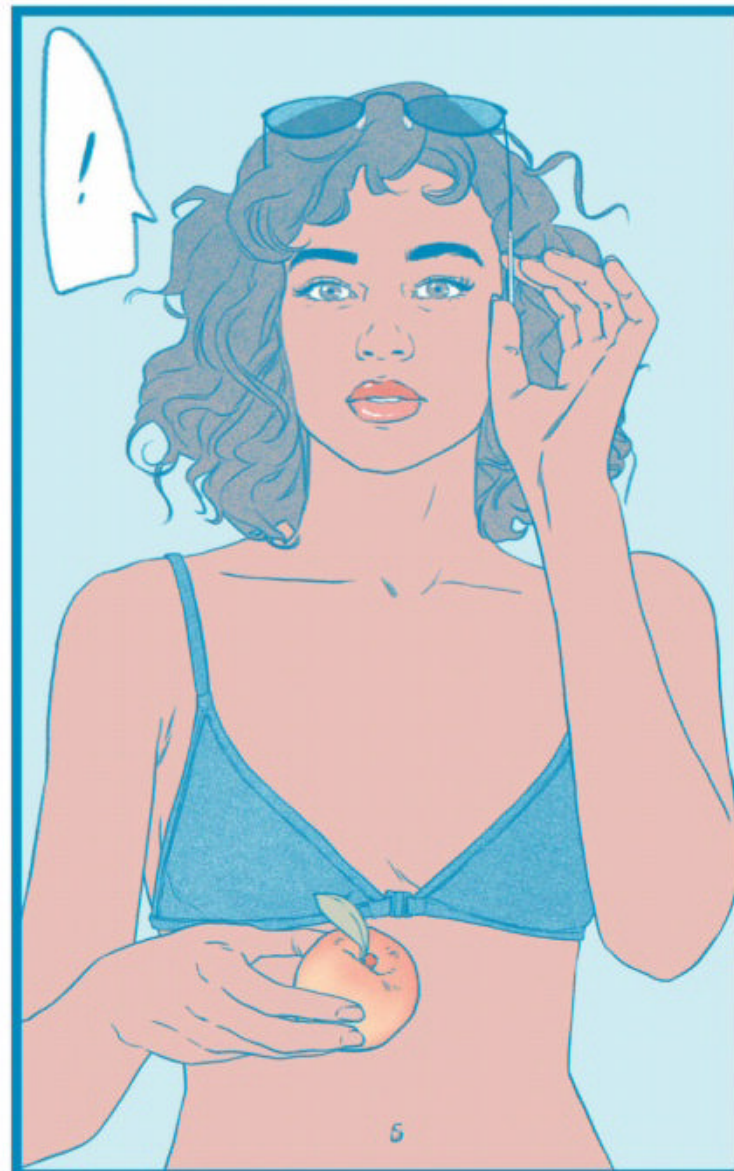
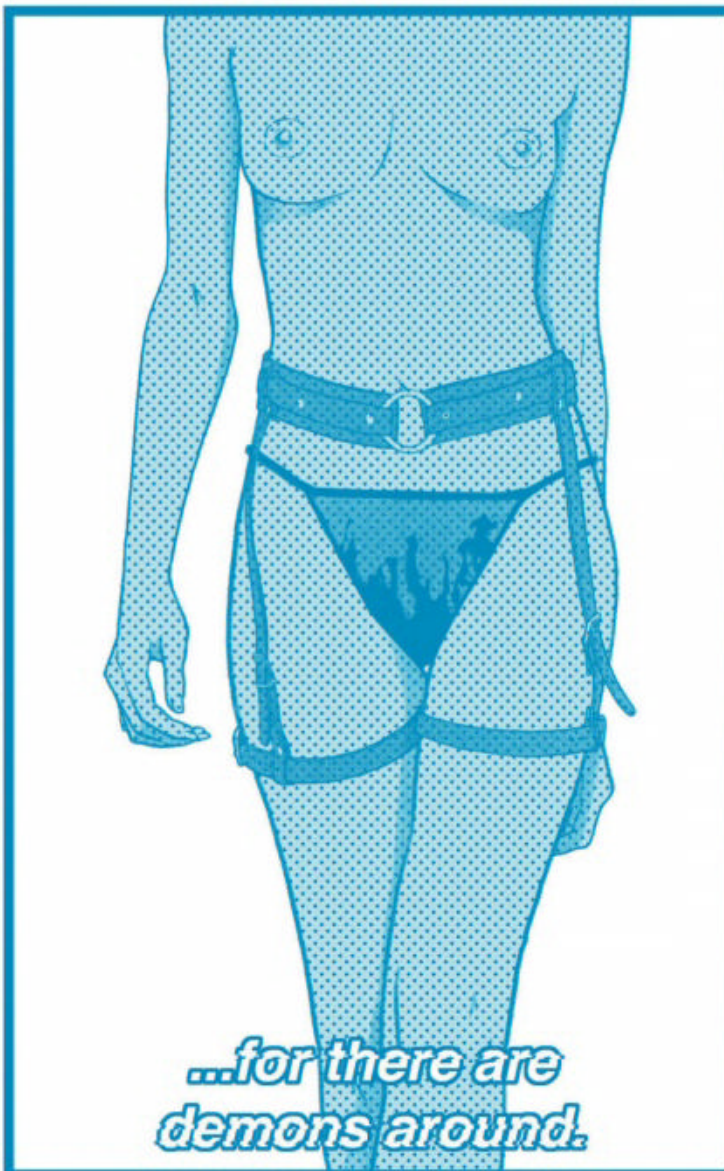
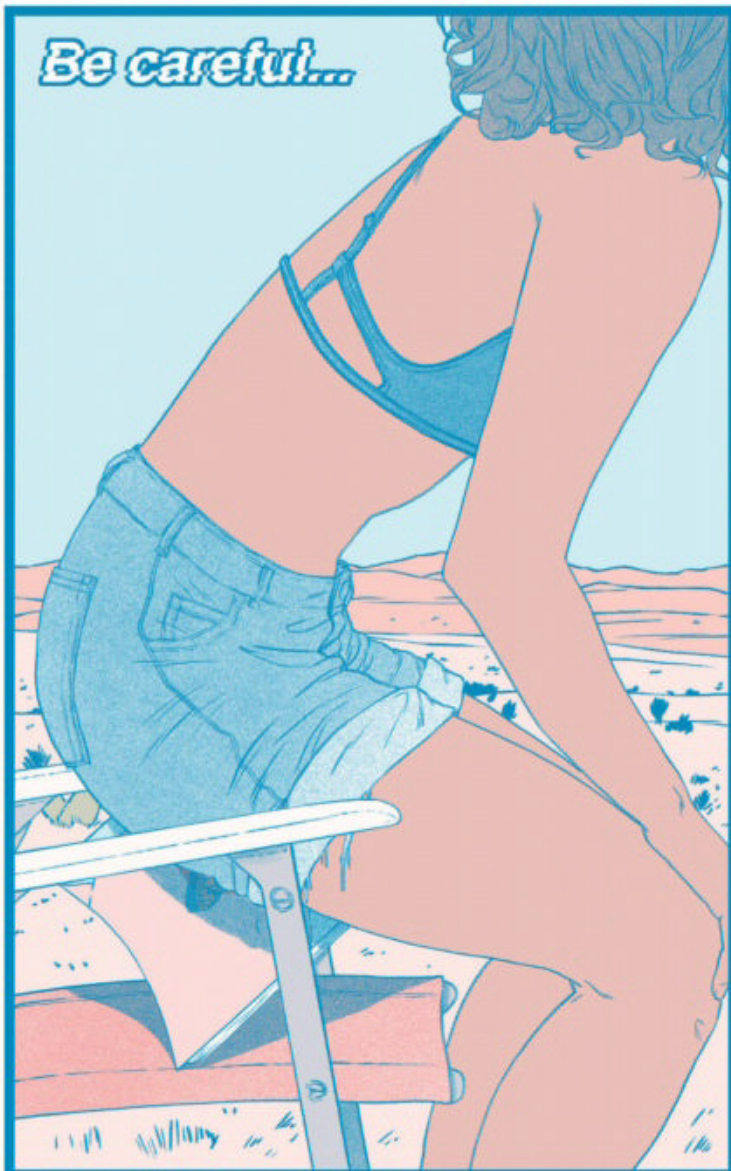
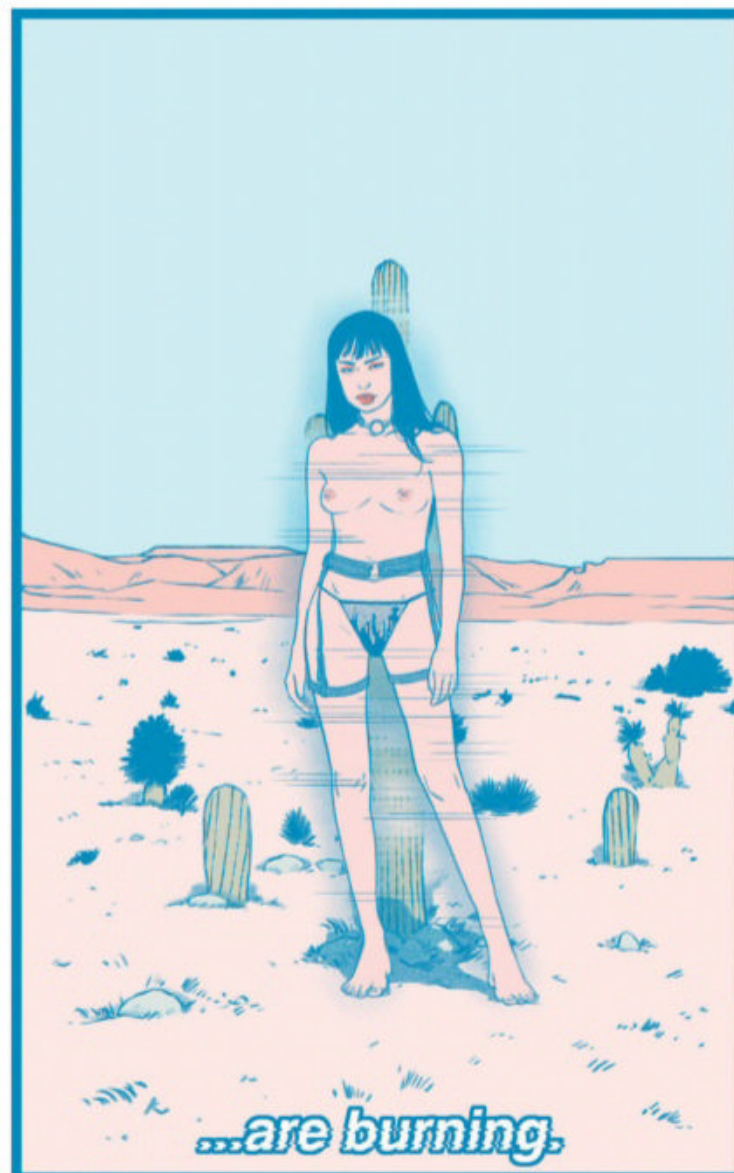
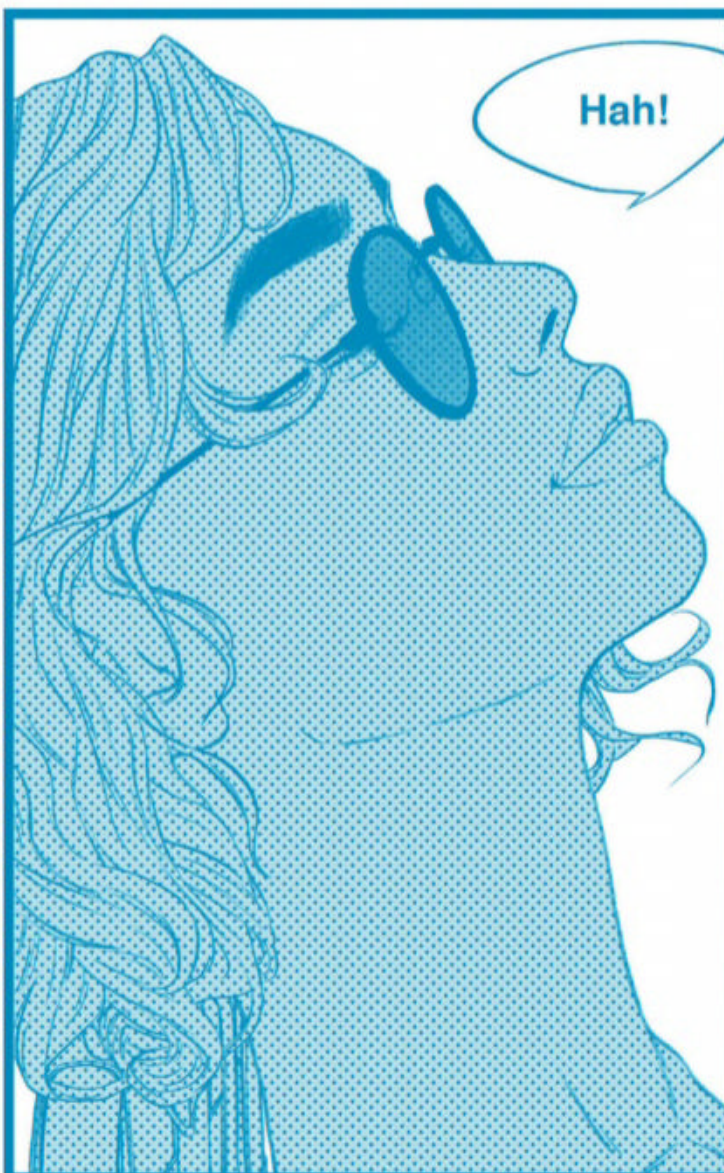
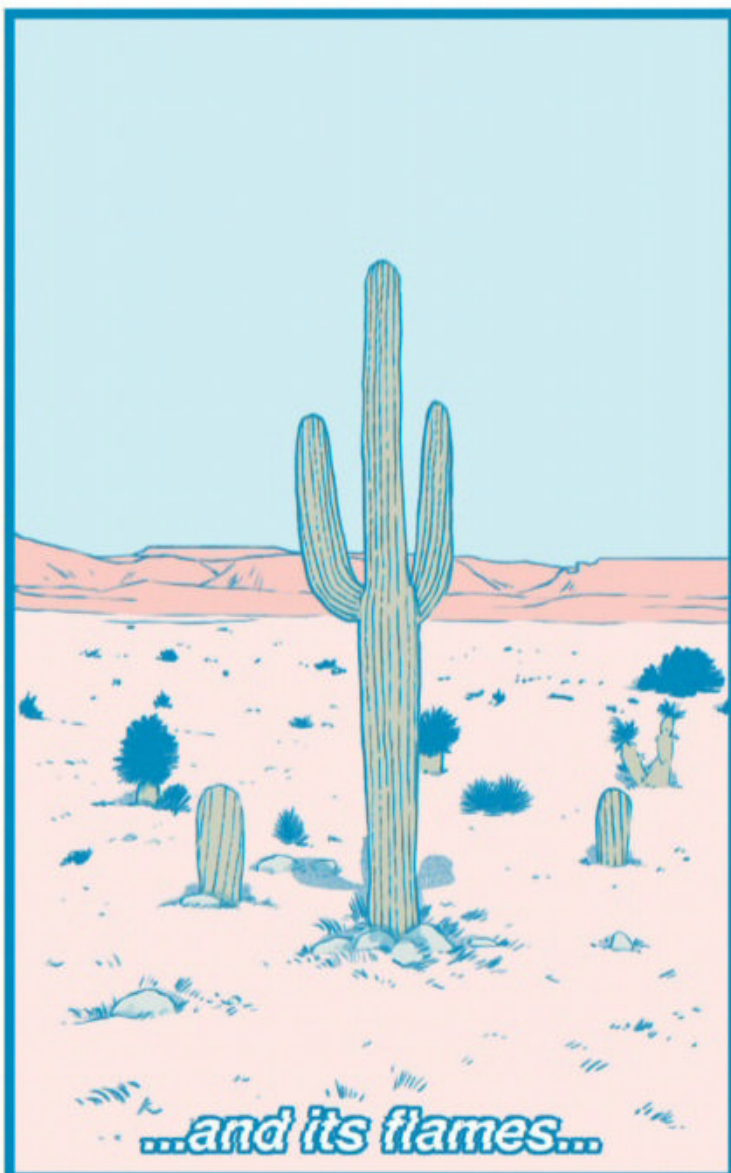


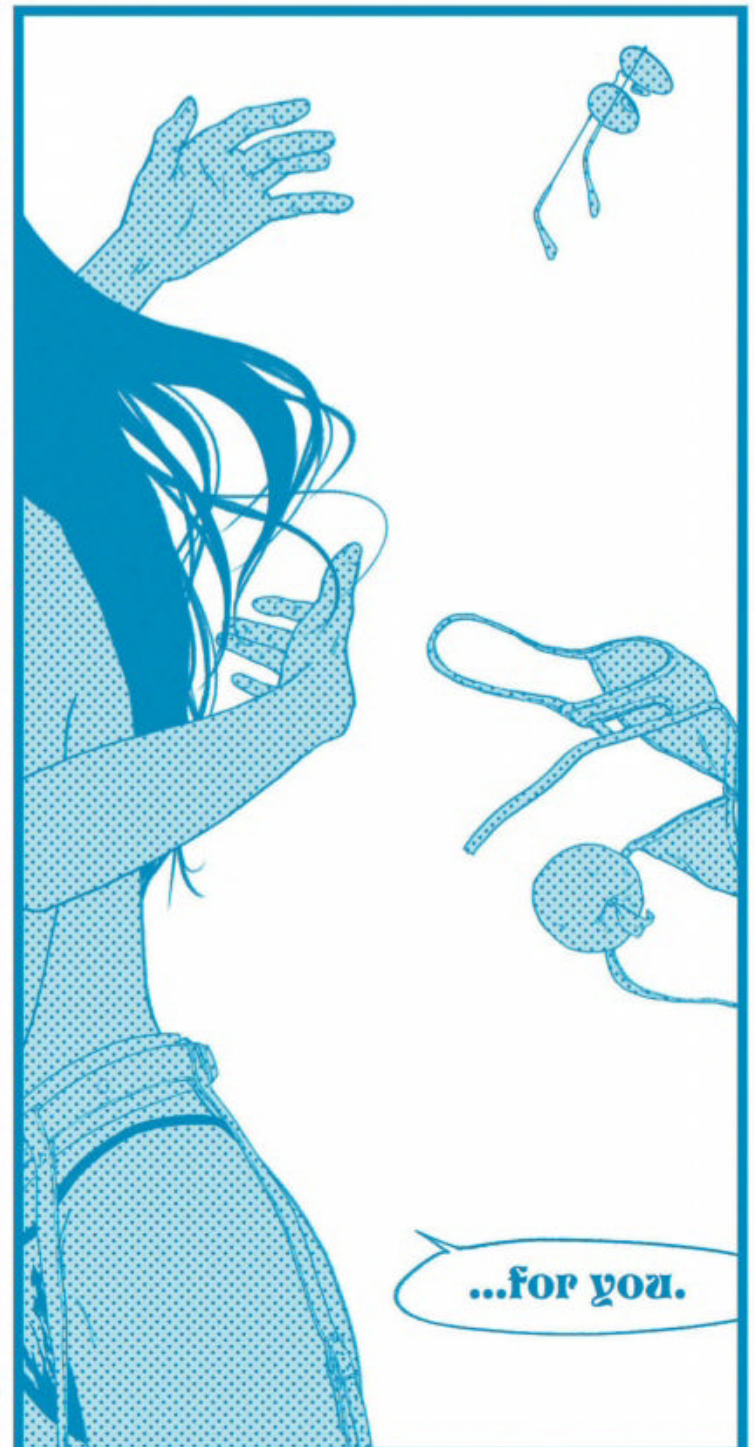
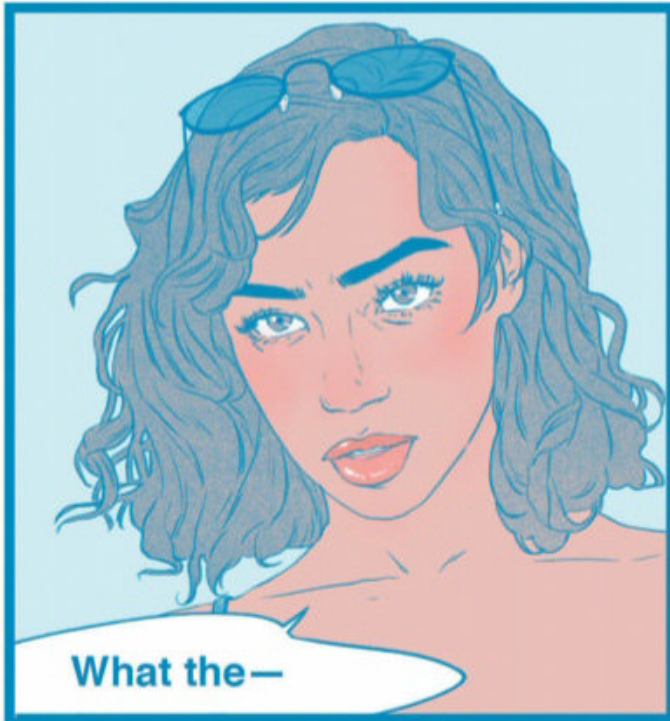


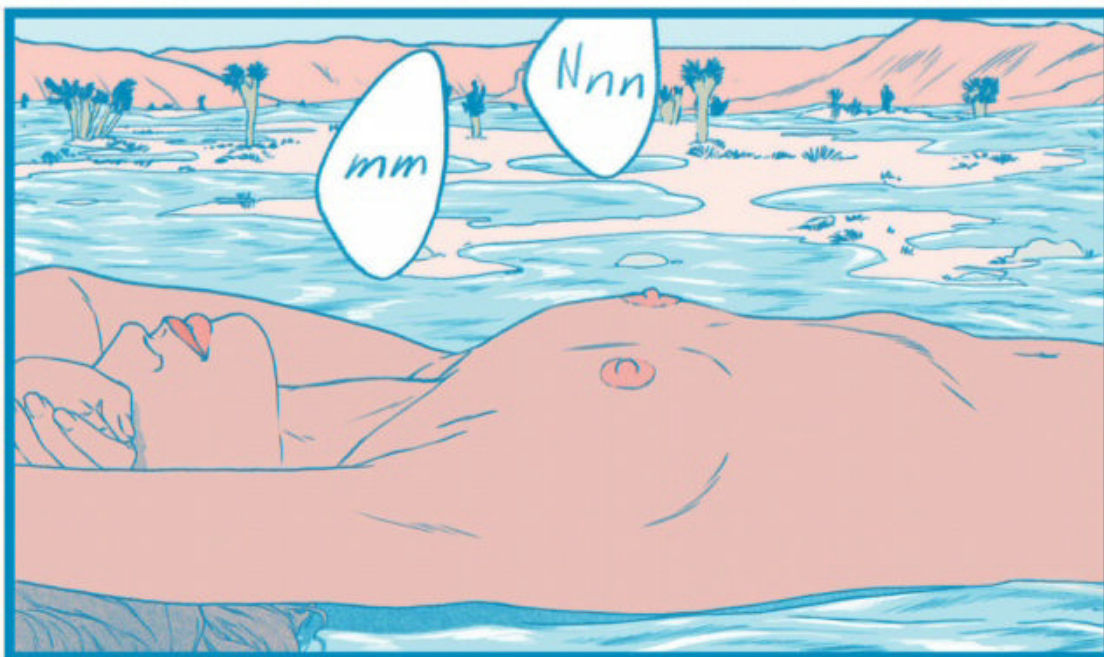
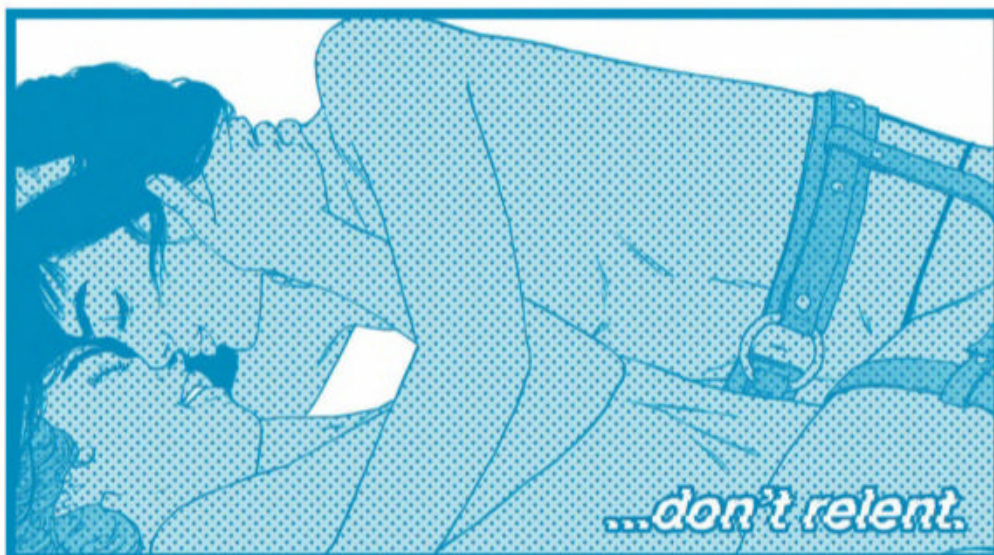


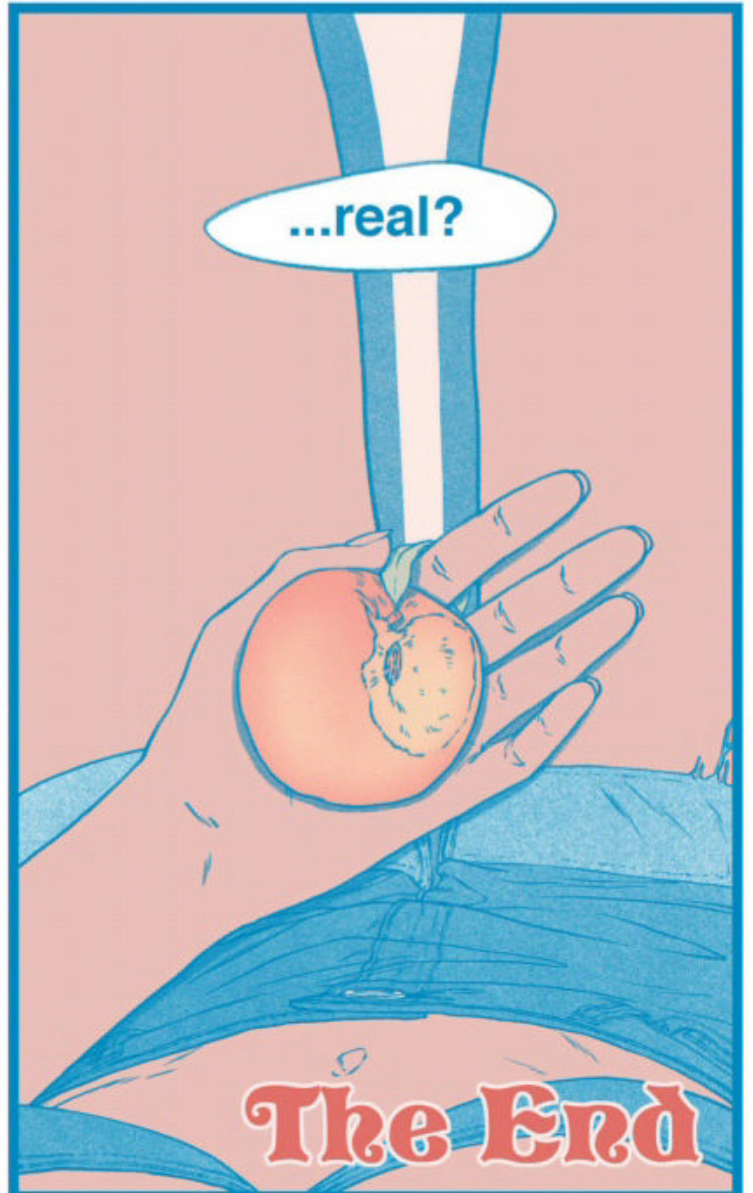
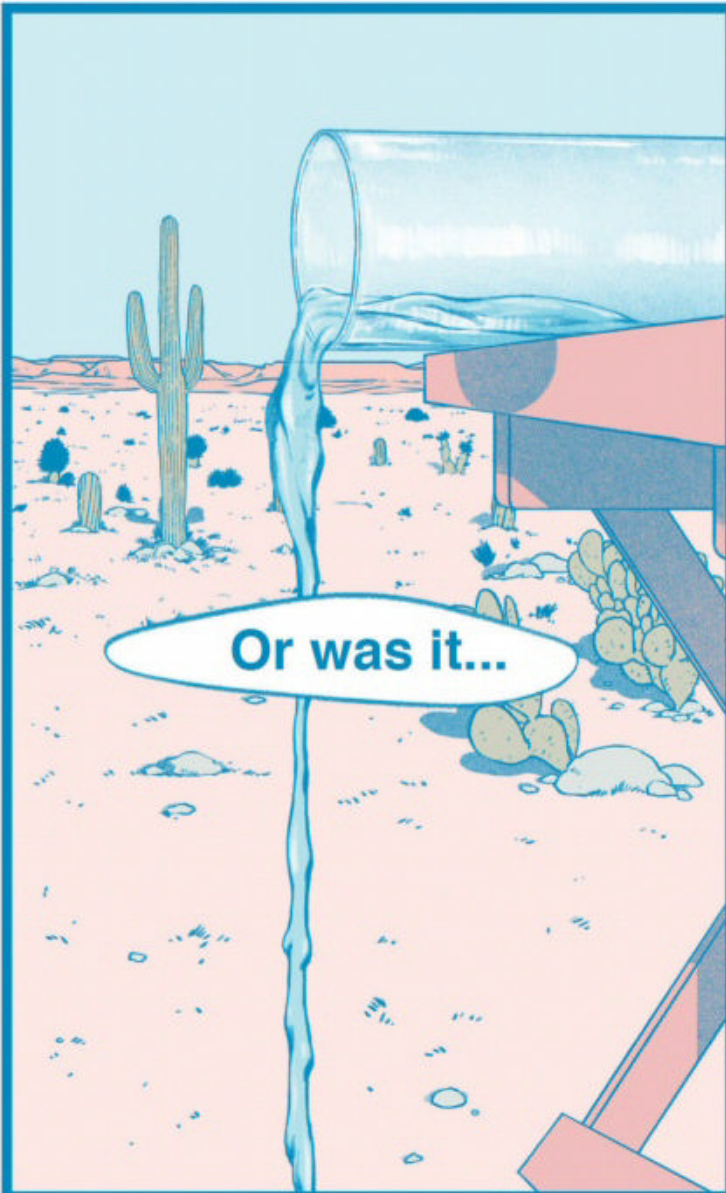
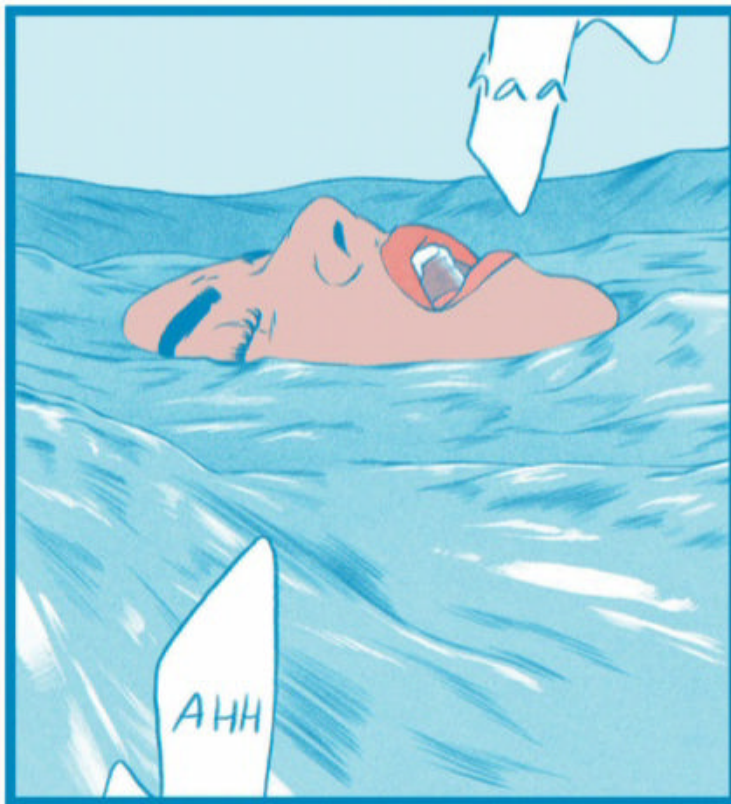














YEAST

DESPERATELY SEARCHING FOR SALVE...AND PERHAPS SALVATION



FICTION BY **LISA TADDEO**

Sorry to bother you on a Saturday, Mia said. Her rose gold phone was on the bed and speakerphone was selected. She was offensively high and her voice sounded smeared. She pictured Dr. Ruspín on the other end, mild and gray-bearded, in a spectacular kitchen. Chickpea alfredo.

She waited for him to say, That's all right, but there was only silence.

It's just preternaturally itchy. Like, the itchi-est it's ever been.

Is there any discharge?

Nope!

Any pain with urination?

No, it's definitely not a UTI. I just need Diflucan. Fluconazole. Though I've taken the generic before and it hasn't quite worked, so.

I'll send a prescription over, but if it doesn't get better you have to come into the office on Monday.

Okay, but I just want you to know I'm positive it's yeast.

What pharmacy do you use?

CVS. Um. Fuck. Sorry. It might not be open. Can you give me a second while I find a 24-hour place near me?

Dr. Ruspín didn't say anything. Mia grabbed her laptop. She typed in 24-hour CVS near me. The internet was slow. Fuck. She took a hit from her tiny wooden vaporizer. Held it in.

Mia?

Yeah?

Why don't you just text it to me when you have it.

Oh, okay. This is your text? I mean, this is your cell?

Yes, said Dr. Ruspín. He sounded irate and bored. Perhaps a highborn wife was beckoning with sauvignon blanc. Mia wanted him to know she wasn't just another loser. She wanted him to know that she knew about white wine. She loved Riesling and Sancerre. She knew a lot.

Okay!

Okay, thanks. Bye now.

Bye!

...

The sativa was hairy and Granny Smith green. It smelled like rain puddles in London in the springtime. And the sweat of a regal man.

I am so high, Mia drawled. She reached her hands between her legs and grated her v with her nails. She'd hoped the pot would dull the itch but if anything it only bejeweled it.

The nearest 24-hour CVS appeared to be in Queens. How was that possible?

Thank God she had a car. Kate's car. It was an aquamarine Chevy Cavalier. The ugliest car in the world.

She texted Dr. Ruspín the phone number of the pharmacy and her DOB.

Six minutes later the phone buzzed.

Done. MY pleasure.

Holy shit, Mia said aloud. Why was MY in all caps? Dr. Ruspín was mostly bald. He was pale and birdlike and she imagined fucking him would be like being a piece of bread on a pier as a seagull shovels its salmon beak across your surface. But he had the power to cure a yeast infection. That was the most any man would have done for her in years. Decades.

She didn't write anything back because she knew being quiet was more powerful. She took a giant hit and held it in for so long she could picture the smoke tinting her lungs a bright jungle green.

Mia thought how weird it was that everyone adored weed. Dads, bankers, chefs, politicians, rich and poor idiots. Loved getting high. But Mia wondered if anyone could even agree on what being

Her hatred of the world and everyone in it was at the lowest rung it had been in decades. She sat under a thick window and pretended to read *La Repubblica*. A waiter brought a glass ramekin of olives that were dry but exotic. The water was ice-cold. There were a few businessmen with martinis engaged with their phones. All of them had cuff links. Her carpaccio arrived too quickly, under a grid of Dijon. The door jingled and a 40-something blonde wearing a clear plastic coat walked in, sat at the bar alone and ordered the butterflied veal.

As the first notes of the wine hit her bloodstream Mia felt the problems of the past year evaporate. In Italy everything that worried her seemed subcutaneous. News was not metastatic in Italy. People read the paper. They watched stocks rise and fall like it was the 1980s. Whenever a strange-looking fellow walked into a coffee shop Mia didn't worry he had a gun.

She ate the carpaccio very slowly, savoring every slippery bite. The door jingled again. A man appeared in the doorway. A real one. Late 30s, early 40s. Snout of a wolf, waxed canvas jacket, Mets cap. He was seated at the table directly across from hers. He sat so that he faced her. The blonde at the bar uncrossed and recrossed her legs and took her plastic jacket

THERE ARE MEN WHO GIVE YOU YEAST INFECTIONS, SHE THOUGHT, AND MEN WHO DON'T.

high on marijuana was like. Some people inhaled frozen veggie burgers and fruit twists and truffle salt popcorn. Other people got sleepy. Others got talkative. Some people felt horny and sexy. Mia understood those people the least. She felt terrifically unattractive when she was high. She felt like a snail, curling inward and eating itself.

Fuck! The itch. It was the worst she'd ever experienced. In her bathroom she turned the shower on to the hottest setting. She took off just her sweatpants and angled her crotch so that it was under direct assault. The water felt cruel. Teasing. Not hot enough. She'd been fantasizing for hours about finding a homeless man on the street and having him wrap a rough Brillo pad around his penis and then fuck her until pain replaced itch. Pain and fear of whatever he'd given her. She wondered if the homeless even contracted STDs. Where would they find the time? Then she remembered everyone always found the time for sex.

The infection could only have come from one of two places. Venice or Hoboken. Last week she'd stayed in an airless but stunning apartment near the Piazza San Marco, right above the Officina Profumo-Farmaceutica di Santa Maria Novella. It was the second best and third worst week of her life. She'd met a man.

One lilac evening at the start of the week Mia had walked into Harry's Bar. She ordered a carafe of red wine. It was brick-colored and ashy. She ordered the carpaccio. She wore a pair of slim navy slacks and a silk camisole. It was July and she was tan all over.

off. Inside the restaurant the air changed. Mia felt the carnal hiss in her veins. It had been so long.

It happened the way all good things do. Like an architect designed it and Mia had no control.

The blonde drank two gin martinis and passed out on the floor. The man in the cap—David—was on the ground in an instant. He picked the slumped body up and splashed Mia's glass of water on the blonde's face. She came to immediately. Came alive in David's arms like a fish. Her skin was like crepe. From the front she looked like someone who had consented to terrible things out of desperation. She had a Polish accent but spoke English well. She said she was in town with a man, and the man was called. The way that David handled her, eased her embarrassment, made Mia thrum down between her legs.

After a visit to the bathroom the blonde left, saying the man would meet her at their hotel. Harry's Bar did not charge her for her drinks and the waiter brought her butterflied veal to David and David asked Mia to join him. They shared a few bites before even knowing each other's names.

I don't like veal but this is amazing, Mia said.

On account of their being kept in cages?

No, Mia said.

David smiled.

Is this your first time in Venice? she said.

That's supposed to be my question.

I know, I stole it on purpose because I didn't have any good ones.

No, this isn't my first time in Venice, David said. The tone of his voice was egotistical and present. Mia felt like an animal of prey that wanted to die. That wanted to be hunted by precisely the right predator.

He was a Nike executive. He had hundreds of thousands of frequent-flyer miles. He was staying at the Hotel Flora. They served a children's tea every day and Mia should have known when he mentioned it that there was a reason he did.

Do you like advertising? he asked. They had moved on to bellinis. He ordered a round without asking her if she wanted one. He wore a Patek Philippe that gleamed.

If you mean, do I hate myself, then no. I don't hate myself. But I do want to write screenplays.

When David laughed, Mia felt her whole trunk rise from the seat. She smelled cherries in the air. The bar filled with Beethoven. Then Tom Petty. Mia thought of Kate, for the first time in months, with gratitude and not with rage. This would be the year, she decided, that she would have one linen top. One pair of swinging pants. One beautiful black silk romper. One pair of leather sandals. One vital under-eye cream. And absolutely nothing else.

Do you want to take a walk through the streets of Venice? he asked once she'd taken the last bite of the veal. He canceled his client dinner and her photo shoot didn't start until the following morning. They walked for nearly six hours, stopping for wine and prosciutto and stracchino at several spots along the way. He paid for everything. Every place looked the same, open doorways, sweating waiters. For the rest of her life Mia would associate hanging muscles of provolone with lust, obsession, happiness. They made love in her room. They did not use protection and she would have taken whatever he had to give her.

They saw each other five more times. All of it walking before fucking and walking after. Coffee turning into wine. Drunk walking through the streets. Church bells. The lime stink of trash, the hot sun, the bruise-colored cold of the canal. In Kirikù she bought herself a camouflage slip dress. I have never seen a sexier woman, he whispered in her ear as she handed the saleslady her Amex. She wore the dress outside with her cowboy boots. It was their last day together. He was flying home in the morning. Home was New York for him too. He'd never said he was married, but he also had never taken the ring off. It was gold and

the perfect thickness and when they fucked Mia watched it move and glint, thinking there was something outrageously pure in the act of not removing it.

...

Higher than she had ever been, Mia drove to Queens. She whooshed down avenues like a criminal. She passed a Thai restaurant and an E-Z DIVORCE and a Tasti D-Lite and a Crocs store and every single thing made her think of David. It was nine o'clock on a Saturday. She couldn't picture him tucking in one of his kids but she could picture him going down on his wife or reading a work of historical fiction.

At the CVS she paid \$5 for her pill. Dr. Ruspin had not provided any refills. Her car was parked crudely, many feet from the curb, but instead of going back to it she slipped into a dive bar, the kind that opened in the morning. She ordered a mimosa, which was close to a bellini.

I only have shit champagne, the female bartender said. Is that okay? Verdi.

Sure, Mia said.

Okay. I also have no flutes.

That's fine.

The bartender served the mimosa in a pint glass with a leprechaun on it. Mia slit her fingernail through the foil wrapper and removed the Diflucan. She placed it on her tongue and washed it down with a bright sip of mimosa. The orange juice tasted sweet and freshly squeezed. Forgetting she was in public she scratched herself violently.

There are men who give you yeast infections, she thought, and men who don't. When she got home from Venice four

nights ago, she e-mailed David. We're in the same town again, she wrote. He did not write back. He didn't write back the next day or the one after. So last night Mia opened up her Bumble and exchanged seven back-and-forths with a lawyer who was three years younger. His location said NY, NY, but he lived in Hoboken and that was where she met him, at one of the two-story bars on Washington Street. She didn't meet him there because it was easy for him but because she wanted to be away from Manhattan. His name was Brent. He wore a stiff shirt from H&M and the least expensive Apple Watch.

Sometimes Mia forgot that, when she was 15, she'd been raped by her social studies teacher. Statutory rape. The teacher, Mr. Hebrides—Jack—went to jail for 15 years. He'd been released just a few months back. His release made the cover of the *Post*.



Jack looked old as fuck, so skinny. She was neither disgusted nor intrigued. She wondered how he would make money and where he would live but that was about it. She wasn't afraid or anything. It was her parents who had put him away and they were both dead.

But when she was with Brent she felt roundly like the girl who'd fucked her history teacher. She felt like a glazed doughnut. Brent was the kind of guy who read the *Post* on his walk from his Hoboken apartment to his Hoboken law firm where he wore his cheap suit in a room of cheap suits. After Mia had drunk three vodka cranberries to Brent's two martinis and two Heinekens, she said, You know the Creeper Teacher? Who was just released from jail?

Yeah, Brent said. He burped and smiled.

That was me. I was the girl.

Mia didn't know why she did it. The instant it was out of her mouth she felt like something on the bottom of a boat.

Oh, fuck. No way.

Yeah, she said.

He smiled wide. His teeth were Civil War teeth. His gums were light pink. He took her hand in his and she thought he was going to kiss her.

So you're all kinky and shit, he said. He brought her palm to his cheap gray pants and placed it over his dick. It was small and hard like a dollar-store water gun.

Mia felt pure hatred bubbling out of her pores and up out of her scalp. Back in his bleach-smelling apartment he fucked her doggy style, her slim jeans manacled her ankles. She imagined herself as a baby calf, being pounded in a small space, and she thought of David. The night they left her room at three in the morning to share a joint by the canals and they passed a baker making croissants and he gave them a blood-orange croissant. It was warm and fresher than anything she'd had in her life. The taste of blood orange was not so much a taste but a scent. A cloud of an idea. They shared it and kissed and smoked excellent weed he'd brought on the plane with him, because he was a champion.

Brent used a ribbed Durex. His tiny penis felt accusatory inside of her. He said Yeah! with every pump. Each one full of his self-hatred and misogyny. At a certain point he pulled out and began to finger her. It was as though he wanted to hurt her in a different way. She began to cramp and worried he'd pulled her IUD out of alignment.

Now, she realized, it was his finger that had done it. His nails, and whatever lived beneath them.

She wished she could tell Kate. That was all she wanted. To sit in Kate's jewel box on Elizabeth with the bookshelves and the Persian rug and the Riesling on the patio. Their penultimate conversation was the last time Mia would ever be in Kate's apartment. She hadn't known then, that it was going to be the last time. She would have taken pictures or stolen the Rodin crema from the exquisite blue bathroom.

On her phone she went into her contacts and scrolled down to Kate's name and number. Staring at it, she downed her mimosa and smacked the glass back down on the bar like a psychopath. She ordered a kamikaze shot because it was the only one she could always remember. Besides tequila. She felt the shot and the mimosa mix with the marijuana in her brain. She took out her little vial of Xanax. She was down to two and a half pills. She googled Diflucan and Xanax and marijuana and alcohol contraindications.

Before the page loaded she swallowed the half pill. She opened

her text exchange with Dr. Ruspín. It was almost midnight.

I'm still itchy, she wrote.

She waited five minutes and sent a question mark.

She waited five minutes more and wrote, Can I also get some alprazolam.

Mia realized the main reason she had fallen in love with David in Venice was because of Kate. Because Kate would have been jealous. A man like David was exactly what Kate had wanted. Not the married part, but Kate would have agreed that a woman in New York over 30 could not be too picky.

She opened up her Talkspace account and typed a feverish emergency note to Susan Premo. Susan was an idiot but there was something homeopathic about writing to her.

Within minutes Susan replied.

That sounds very stressful! And it must be so hard to not be able to tell your best friend.

Yeah, Mia wrote right away, it sucks. She knew she could keep Susan hanging on the other end. The platform wasn't supposed to work like instant messaging but Susan couldn't help herself. She aimed to please. Mia loathed Susan's transparency and availability.

Toward the end Mia had found out that Kate had lied about not getting her calls. She had two "broken" phones in the space of a month. She also occasionally switched her iMessage off and claimed that she'd been in a bad service area. The problem was Kate always pretended to be ignorant of technical stuff. So for many months Mia believed her.

Are you all set? the bartender asked. She had a pierced brow and stunning green eyes.

Mia was wasted. But why, she wondered, did the bartender want her to go? If she were a man the bartender would ask her if she wanted another round. If she were a man, she would have left her change on the bar top, the way that men did.

Yes, I'm all set.

Mia paid and got back in her car. Kate's car. They had driven to so many places in it. They had seen everything there was to see along the Hudson. Across the dashboard and on the gear shift console and along the bottoms of the windows were the bumper stickers of all the places they had visited in the car. It had been Mia's idea to put the stickers on the inside because they were reminders for them, the two girls, not for people on the outside of their car. It was always Mia who had the sentimental ideas.

On the horn was a bratwurst and spaetzle sticker from Mountain Brauhaus in Gardiner, New York, where they'd drunk beers from steins and eaten wienerschnitzel with fried eggs on top. That day had seemed to go on forever. Briefly they'd entertained quitting their jobs and becoming waitresses at the Mountain Brauhaus.

We could rent an entire house, Mia had said. And get a dog.

A husky, Kate said. She drank less than Mia did. She almost always drove.

After lunch that day they went to a sugar shack and talked to the men who ran it. Two burly brothers whose names were actually Nick and Dick.

Which do you want? Kate whispered. She was always doing things like that. Making Mia feel like everything was up to her. It was a lie. Kate would have flirted with whatever brother she wanted behind Mia's back. Kate had been into men too much. Anyway Nick and Dick's wives came out from the main house. They both had straw-colored hair and hippie clothes. Kate and Mia drove giggling to Hudson. They drank more and ate a

seven-course dinner. They took turns taking a bath at the bed-and-breakfast they couldn't afford.

Now Mia drove back toward Manhattan. She could barely see. Between her legs the itch had purpled into something cruel. In the past her yeast infections had simmered down within 20 minutes of taking the medicine.

Her phone vibed. It was a text from the guy, Brent. She thought he hated her. She'd left the very second after he came. She wondered why she'd waited until he came. Why was it not over until the man came? Even if you hated him? She wanted to ask Kate.

The text from Brent said, Wut u into?

Holding the steering wheel with her left hand she opened Talkspace with her right and wrote to Susan Premo.

Do you think there are men who give yeast infections and men who don't?

Susan didn't reply right away so Mia wrote, What do I do? I'm driving in a car under the influence. I don't like myself.

While she waited, she texted Dr. Ruspin.

It's so itchy I want to kill myself.

Outside her window the moon was viscous and orange. She was grateful she was this fucked-up. She thought how nuts it was that the woman she'd been last week with David was nothing like the

thought they were deeper than they were. Mia truly believed in her heart they could quit their jobs and become waitresses at Mountain Brauhaus. And rent a split-level with yellow grass and get a rescue dog in an indeterminate flavor of gray. For Mia, doing so would have plugged the holes in her heart left by all the things that shoot up holes in the heart. Kate didn't have a heart. That was apparent now.

Mia passed the Robin Ridge Apartments then. She gagged. It was the ugliest apartment complex the girls had ever seen.

Kate had said, If we don't find dudes soon, we might as well move in there. Get instant udon from that bodega and drink wine called Vanessa every Saturday night.

Ewww! Mia had said. But inside she felt warm.

She looked at her phone again. Why the fuck wasn't Susan Premo writing her back! She was paying \$196 a month for someone to fucking act like they cared on the phone.

She texted Brent back. She wrote, I have syphilis.

Then she opened up her e-mail and typed David's beautiful full name in.

You won't get away with what you did to me.

The problem, she realized—what Kate would have said right away—the problem was thinking there were some men who

OUTSIDE HER WINDOW THE MOON WAS VISCOUS AND ORANGE. SHE WAS GRATEFUL SHE WAS THIS FUCKED-UP.

mongrel she was right now. In this teal Chevy Cavalier, driving fast and high with the windows open, mascara smudge under her eyes. Absolutely no music on the radio.

A few weeks before Kate was gone, they had a terrific fight. It ended with a brawl outside a bar. Mia threw Kate on the ground and kicked her in the neck. She didn't know why the neck. Looking down at her friend on the ground, Mia felt like she was looking at herself. She didn't want to hurt the face. Kate was not beautiful but she was pretty. She'd told Kate the truth about Mr. Hebrides. That she'd fucked him willingly and then told her parents she'd been groomed and coerced. Now Kate lay there on the curb, her red hair spilling like trash, and said, You weird pathetic slut. You ruined a man's life because you're a weird pathetic slut.

You'll never be beautiful, Mia said.

Then Kate said something else, but Mia had to block it out. It was too hard. She thought, That's it, I hope she dies there tonight. Mia walked away.

She got as far as Christopher and doubled back, running in her heels. Then she took the heels off and ran some more. But Kate was gone.

In the morning Mia brought flowers and doughnuts. She knocked and knocked on the blue door of the most beautiful floor-through on the Lower East Side. The problem, she realized now, was that she thought there was something to fix. She

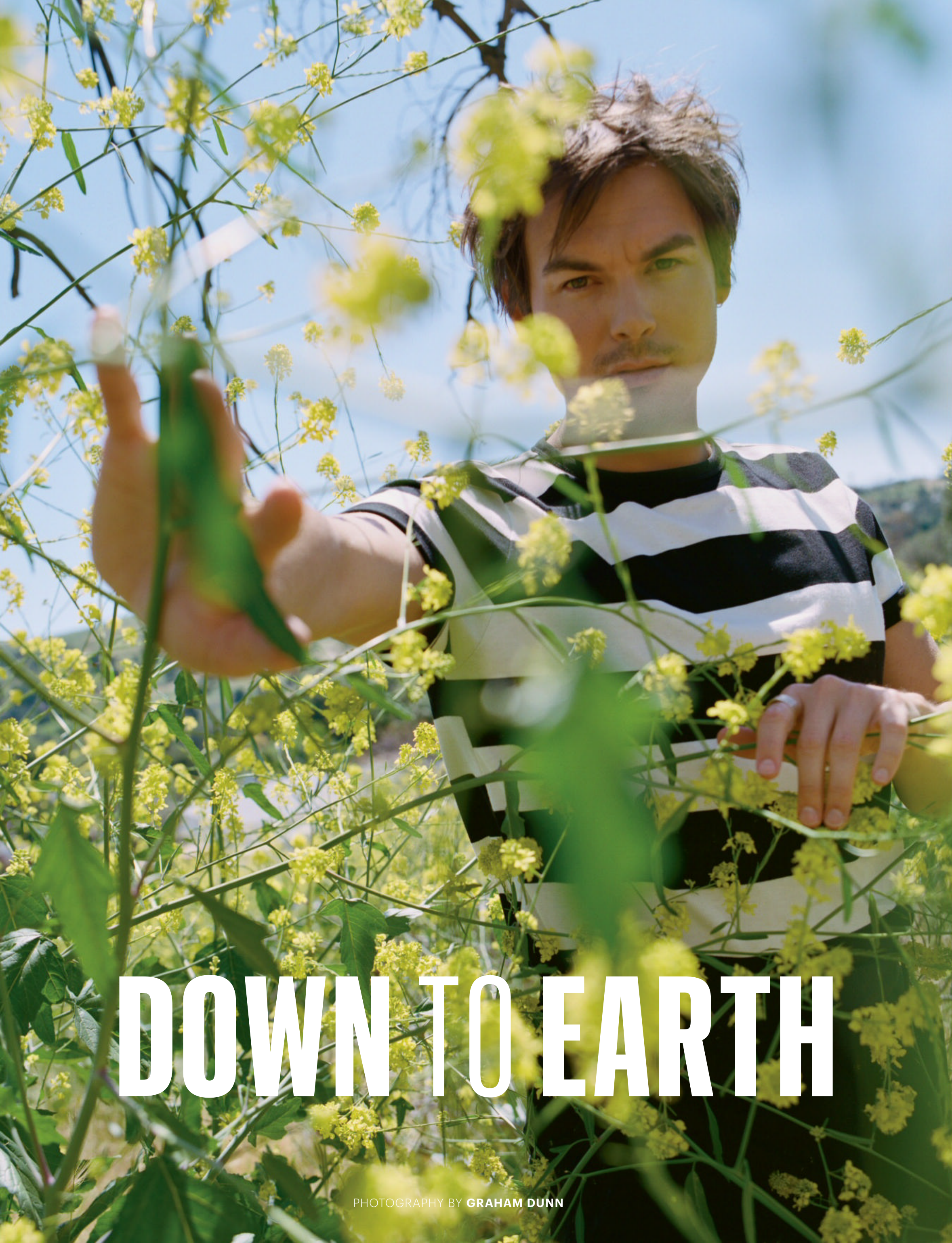
didn't give yeast infections. They all gave them. Some were just more insidious than others. The quieter ones were worse. They itched the soul.

Men were all terrible. Kate should have known. She must have known. But if Kate knew that, then why did Kate move to Palmetto Bluff with a man? A man that Mia had never met. A man Kate had said was just some guy from Tinder. A man she saw every other day for months while lying to Mia, telling her she was working or sick or depressed. The whole time Kate had been eating at new restaurants and falling in love.

And Susan Premo and everyone in the world that Mia met from here on out, she would tell the same thing. That Kate had died. Because that's what happened. The Kate that Mia thought Kate was had died.

In her e-mail to David, she deleted *to me*. Just as she was thinking how people always say don't text and drive, how come no one ever says don't e-mail and drive, just as she was thinking that, she hit something. Like a bowling pin but taller and more formidable. She was beyond high and drunk and so she laughed, because it didn't seem like a big deal. Nothing was. It was just life.

She looked in her rearview mirror and saw that it was a man. A resident, perhaps, of the Robin Ridge Apartments. She didn't want to keep driving, but she did. Then she hit SEND and felt truly free, like a seagull or someone who had already died. ■



DOWN TO EARTH

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GRAHAM DUNN

**Tyler Blackburn,
star of *Pretty
Little Liars* and
the *Roswell*
reboot, is proud
to be a man who
isn't the poster
child for anything
but his own path**

BY **RYAN
GAJEWSKI**

I've never met Tyler Blackburn before—except that I have. Maybe it would be more accurate to say I've met versions of Tyler Blackburn. I've spent time with the actor on multiple occasions while covering his TV series *Pretty Little Liars*, the soapy teen-centered murder mystery that regularly generated more than a million tweets throughout its seven-season run. Just two weeks ago I reconnected with him in a lush meadow of flowering mustard outside Angeles National Forest, the site of his PLAYBOY photo shoot. But the Tyler Blackburn I'm meeting today at his home in the Atwater Village neighborhood of Los Angeles is in many ways an entirely different man.

When he greets me at the front door, Blackburn is relaxed, barefoot and still wearing what appears to be bed head. His disposition is unmistakably freer—lighter—than it's been during our previous encounters. Perhaps I shouldn't be surprised by this. Six days earlier the 32-year-old actor came out publicly as bisexual in an online interview with *The Advocate*. The announcement is clearly at the forefront of his mind as we sit down at his dining room table.

Almost immediately he starts to gush about the positive, and at times overwhelming, feedback he has received over the past few days. Within minutes he's in tears. He tries to lighten the mood with a self-effacing quip, but now I'm in tears too. Then he tells me he can't remember my question.

I haven't even asked one yet, I reply.

"It just makes me feel, *Wow*, the world's a little bit safer than I thought it was," Blackburn says.

The most affecting response he's received thus far has been from his father, whom Black-

burn didn't meet until he was five years old. Although he avoids offering any more details about that early chapter, he says, "Feeling like I'm a little bit different always made me wonder if he likes me, approves of me, loves me. He called, and it was just every single thing you would want to hear from your dad: 'That was a bold move. I'm so proud of you.' It was wild."

Blackburn can't pinpoint the exact moment he knew he was bisexual but says he was curious from the age of 16. It wasn't until two years ago, though, that he decided to approach his publicity team about coming out publicly. At that point, *Pretty Little Liars* had wrapped, and the actor was without a job. So Blackburn and his team agreed they needed to hold off on making an announcement until his career was stable again. The lack of resolution weighed on him.

"A year ago I was in a very bad place," he says, adding that he has struggled with depression and anxiety. "I didn't know what my career was going to be or where it was going. My personal life—my relationship with myself—was in a really bad place."

His casting on the CW's *Roswell, New Mexico*, adapted from the same Melinda Metz book series as the WB's 1999 cult favorite *Roswell*, seems to have come at the right time. Blackburn portrays Alex, a gay Army veteran whose relationship with Michael, a bisexual alien, has attracted legions of "Malex" devotees since the show's January debut. *Roswell, New Mexico* has already been renewed for a second season—a feat for any series in this era of streaming, let alone one involving gay exophilia.

Playing a character whose queerness has been so widely embraced by fans no doubt nudged Blackburn closer to revealing his truth for the first time since becoming an actor 15 years ago. (As he told *The Advocate*, "I'm so tired of caring so much. I just want to...feel okay with experiencing love and experiencing self-love.") Still, he was somewhat reluctant. His hesitation was rooted in the fact that he wouldn't be able to control what came next: the social pressures that often come with being one of the first—in his case, one of the first openly bisexual male actors to lead a prime-time television series.

"If you stand for this thing, and you say it publicly, there's suddenly the expectation of 'Now your job is *this*,'" he says. "Even if someone's like, 'Now you're going to go be



the spokesperson’—well, no. If I don’t want to, I don’t want to. And that doesn’t mean I’m a half-assed queer.”

• • •

Full disclosure: I previously wrote for a *Pretty Little Liars* fan site. In 2012 I published a listicle that ranked the show’s hottest male characters. Blackburn cracks up when I tell him this and wants to know whether he bested Ian Harding, his former co-star. After I inform him that his character (hacker with a heart of gold Caleb Rivers) finished second behind Harding’s (Ezra Fitz, a student-dating teacher) I promise to organize a recount. The always-modest Blackburn concedes that Harding is the rightful winner. (If anyone ever compiles a BuzzFeed article titled “Most Embarrassing Moments for Former Bloggers,” I’ll be offended if I’m not in the mix.)

Blackburn makes it clear that he has not always been comfortable with his status as a teen heartthrob. Knowing he was queer made it “hard to embrace it and enjoy it.” Growing up, he was bullied for being perceived as effeminate and was frequently subjected to slurs and homophobic jokes. He describes himself as a late bloomer who took longer than usual to shed his baby fat. He didn’t have many friends, nor did he date much in high school.

A lifelong fan of musical theater and the performing arts, Blackburn signed with a Hollywood management company at the

age of 17. His team at the time warned him that projecting femininity would hinder his success. An especially painful moment came after he’d auditioned for a role as a soldier and the producers wrote back that Blackburn had seemed “a little gay.”

“Those two managers were so twisted in their advice to me,” Blackburn says. “They just said, ‘We don’t care if you are, but no one can know. You can’t walk into these rooms and seem gay. It’s not gonna work.’ I remember the shame, because I’ve been dealing with the feeling that I’m not a normal boy for my entire life.”

After landing a recurring role on *Days of Our Lives* in 2010, Blackburn scored his big break when he appeared midway through the first season of *Pretty Little Liars*. “I was in Tyler’s first scene, so I got to be one of the first to work with him,” Shay Mitchell, who starred opposite Blackburn, tells *PLAYBOY*. “Right away, I knew he was special. Since the day I met him, Tyler always struck me as very authentic and very true to himself.”

Fans instantly adored his on-screen love affair with Hanna Marin, played by Ashley Benson. The pair became known as “Haleb,” and Blackburn went on to win three Teen Choice Awards—surfboard trophies that solidify one’s status as a teen idol—in categories including Choice TV: Chemistry.

According to Blackburn, during the show’s seven years on the air, he and Benson bonded over their mutual distaste for the tabloid stardom that comes with headlining a TV phenomenon lapped up by teens. Today he fondly reflects on their

on-camera chemistry. “It felt good,” he says. “It felt real.”

Of course, rumors swirled that the pair’s romance was actually quite real. “We never officially dated,” he tells me. “In navigating our relationship—as co-workers but also as friends—sometimes the lines blurred a little. We had periods when we felt more for each other, but ultimately we’re good buds. For the most part, those rumors made us laugh. But then sometimes we’d be like, ‘Did someone see us hugging the other night?’ She was a huge part of a huge change in my life, so I’ll always hold her dear.”

Blackburn also shares a unique connection with Mitchell outside their friendship. Similar to what Blackburn is now experiencing with *Roswell*, Mitchell was embraced by the LGBTQ community for playing a lesbian character, Emily Fields, whose same-sex romances on *Pretty Little Liars* were among the first on ABC Family (the former name of the Freeform network).

Over the years, Blackburn had come out to select members of the *Pretty Little Liars* cast and crew, including creator I. Marlene King. But as the show approached its swan song, he started to recognize how hiding a part of himself was negatively affecting his life. He entered his first serious relationship with a man while filming the show’s final season. Not knowing how to tell co-workers—or whether to, say, invite his boyfriend to an afterparty—caused him to “go into a little bit of a shell” on the set.

“My boyfriend was hanging out with me at a *Pretty Little Liars* convention, and some of the fans were like, ‘Are you Tyler’s brother?’” Blackburn says. “He was very patient, but then afterward he was like, ‘That kind of hurt me.’ It was a big part of why we didn’t work out, just because he was at a different place than I was. Unfortunately, we don’t really talk anymore, but if he reads this, I hope he knows that he helped me so much in so many ways.” At that, Blackburn tearfully excuses himself and takes a private moment to regain his composure.

“I never remember a time when I didn’t enjoy being with him,” says Harding, Blackburn’s former co-star. He says he saw the actor “start to become the person he is now when we worked together” but believes Blackburn needed to first come to terms with the idea that he could become “the face” of bisexuality. “Tyler’s discovering a way to bring real meaning with his presence in the world,” Harding says, “as an actor and as a whole human.”

• • •

Once the teenage Blackburn realized he was attracted to guys, he began “experimenting” with men while taking care not to become too emotionally attached. “I just didn’t feel I had the inner strength or the certainty that it was okay,” he says. It wasn’t until a decade later, at the age of 26, that he began to “actively embrace my bisexuality and start dating men, or at least open myself up to the idea.” He says he’s been in love with two women and had great relationships with both, but he “just knew that wasn’t the whole story.”

He was able to enjoy being single in his 20s in part because he wasn’t confident enough in his identity to commit to any one person in a relationship. “I had to really be patient with myself—and more so with men,” he says. “Certain things are much easier with women, just anatomically, and there’s a freedom in that.” He came out of that period with an appreciation for romance and intimacy. Sex without an emotional component, he discovered, didn’t have much appeal.

“As I got older, I realized good sex is when you really have something between the two of you,” says Blackburn, who’s now dating an “amazing” guy. “It’s not just a body. The more I’ve realized that, the more able I am to be settled in my sexuality. I’m freer in my sexuality now. I’m very sexual; it’s a beautiful aspect of life.”

Blackburn has, however, felt resistance from the LGBTQ community, particularly when bisexual women have questioned his orientation. “Once I decided to date men, I was like, Please just let me be gay and be okay with that, because it would be a lot fucking easier. At times, bisexuality feels like a big gray zone,” he says. (For example, Blackburn knows his sexuality may complicate how he becomes a father.) “I’ve had to check myself and say, I know how I felt when I was in love with women and when I slept with women. That was true and real. Don’t discredit that, because you’re feeding into what other people think about bisexuality.”

Blackburn finds it funny that he’s known for young-skewing TV shows; the question is, What might define him next? He’s grateful for his career, but he grew up wanting to make edgy dramas like the young Leonardo DiCaprio. He also cites an admiration for Ezra Miller, the queer actor who plays the Flash. “I most definitely want to be a fucking superhero one day,” Blackburn says a bit wistfully.

His path to cape wearing does look more tenable. The day before his *Advocate* interview was posted, he booked a lead role in a fact-based disaster-survival film opposite Josh Duhamel. Blackburn jokes that his movie career was previously nonexistent, though his résumé features such thoughtful indie fare as

2017’s vignette-driven *Hello Again*. There, he plays a love interest to T.R. Knight, who tells *PLAYBOY* that Blackburn “embraces the challenge to stretch and not choose the easy path.”

For now, Blackburn’s path appears to be just where he needs it to be. “I may never want to be a spokesperson in a huge way, but honestly, being truthful and authentic sets a great example,” he says. “To continue on a path of fulfillment and happiness is going to make people feel like they too can have that and it doesn’t need to be some spectacle.” As it turns out, he may already be a superhero. ■





IN SEARCH OF THE #20BITEEN MAN

ART BY OSCAR RODRÍGUEZ AMADO



SEXUAL EXPRESSION
HAS ARGUABLY NEVER
BEEN MORE INCLUSIVE,
BUT BISEXUAL MEN STILL
STRUGGLE SIMPLY TO
CONVINCE THE WORLD
THEY EXIST. WE ASKED
FIVE OF THEM TO TELL US
THEIR STORIES

BY **DANA
HAMILTON**

“I don’t think I could date a bi guy,” a friend recently told me. “I’d be constantly paranoid that he’d want to leave.”

I had giddily sent her a picture and some quick facts about the man I was going out with that night—bi, a dad, a scientist—which I usually do before a date, both out of excitement and for my safety. But when I got my friend’s response, my stomach dropped, even though it was hardly the first time I’d heard something like it.

As a sex columnist, I strive to clear up myths, whether they’re rooted in fact (blue balls) or not (“accidental” anal). I’ve written about baby play, sex dolls and furies, and no one has batted an eye in terms of accepting their validity. Yet male bisexuality remains a blind spot even in my relatively progressive inner circle. I’ve been asked if I worry about being cheated on or contracting an STI and why I bother dating bi men if they “all end up with other guys anyway.” I thought the rise of the hashtag #20BiTeen would help, but scrolling through the posts, I see next to no men. The only place I find any is in my dating-app DMs. So where are they?

The 2016 National Survey of Family Growth shows that 1.8 percent of adult men and

5.6 percent of adult women ages 18 to 44 identify as bisexual. (Bisexuality was first widely recognized as an orientation by the scientific community in the 1950s.) Those numbers have been rising incrementally, and search-engine statistics suggest they’ll continue to do so: Since 2016, searches for “bisexual test” have risen by 90 percent, “Am I bi? quiz” by 182 percent and “signs of bisexuality in males” by a whopping 2,147 percent, according to a global study conducted by SEMrush. But the NSFG research also indicates that far more people have had same-sex sexual encounters than ultimately identify as bi. This discrepancy has come up in the data for the past 30 years—despite the fact that in large, population-based studies, bisexual behavior is more common than purely lesbian or gay behavior.

Kerith Conron, research director at the UCLA School of Law’s Williams Institute, who specializes in health inequities in the LGBTQ community, has also observed the gap between behavior and identification. “Among men 18 to 44, almost six percent report some sexual attraction to men in addition to women,” she explains. “And then when we look at behavior,



about five percent of men in the 18-to-44 age group report having had oral sex with another man in their lifetime.” This data stands in stark contrast to the NSFG study’s 1.8 percent of men who self-identify as bisexual.

The behavior-identification gap is shrinking at a slower pace for men. That’s largely due to stigma: Conron’s research has shown that societal attitudes toward female sexuality are more open and fluid, while tolerance for men who have slept with other men is still low. After all, “No homo” and “That’s so gay” linger in our lexicon.

“Bisexual men aren’t stupid—they know to anticipate a negative reaction,” says Brian Dodge, professor at Indiana University Bloomington’s School of Public Health. “We’ve had participants in studies say, ‘I’d lose my family, I’d lose my kids, I’d lose everything.’ Disclosure is complicated.”

A leading researcher on male bisexuality, Dodge conducted a study on biases toward bisexual people. He explored people’s perceptions in relation to five common stereotypes: that bi people are confused, prone to sexually transmitted infections, unfaithful, promiscuous and/or going through a phase. From there, he created BIAS (Bisexualities: Indiana Attitudes Scale) to measure those attitudes. Dodge believes the most damaging notions concern erasure—the belief that bisexual people are confused or that their sexuality is temporary. He explains that bisexuality requires constant validation, “whereas when someone says, ‘I’m gay,’ it’s just sort of taken at face value now. None of the stereotypes are fun, but the invalidation of existence—you’re confused, you’re just experimenting—all those things fall under that umbrella.”

Regarding the idea that bisexual people are more likely to be unfaithful in relationships, neither Dodge nor Conron have seen data to support that assumption. And when it comes to STI risk, recent statistical research shows that the numbers of heterosexual men and bisexual men who are HIV-positive are likely nearly identical.

Even within their own populations, bisexual people face daunting challenges when it comes to identity. We’ve seen new language emerge in recent years to articulate a greater number of sexual categories—fluid, heteroflexible, pansexual—and while that is undoubtedly a good thing, it can create a fracturing effect. People are claiming myriad sexual minorities because there are more words to describe their orientations and desires, but with each categorization comes a need to belong within that category. Bisexuals are getting siloed within their own community.

And then there’s the problematic connotation of “bi”: The term *bisexual* has come under scrutiny for excluding non-binary and transgender people. But shrugging off a word that has helped define you, especially from the margins, is easier said than done. And in recent studies Dodge has noted that people with identities outside the binary are the most accepting of bisexuality, followed by gay and lesbian people—and, lastly, heterosexual men.

The combination of tensions within the LGBTQ community and poor attitudes from the heterosexual mainstream leads to double discrimination. It’s not hard to imagine the effect that prolonged societal stigma and lack of solidarity would have on mental health: Bisexual individuals consistently report higher rates of mental health disorders, substance abuse and suicidal ideation, even when compared with other groups within the LGBTQ community.

Despite it all, men are thinking about bisexuality. They’re

“FOR A LONG
TIME MY LINE
WAS ‘I’M THE
ONLY BISEXUAL
MAN I KNOW,
BUT I’VE
FUCKED A LOT
OF STRAIGHT
GUYS.’ ”

googling it. They may even be engaging in it—though not many of them are coming out. But they do exist, and they have a lot to say. I sat down with five men to talk about what it’s like being bi and proud in #20BiTeen.

ON TERMINOLOGY

DOMINIC MINOR

Age: 29

Location: Minneapolis

Occupation: sales

Status: single

I identify as bi in addition to identifying as queer. Even though I’m relatively young, I’m still old-school, so I kind of existed before there was really language outside the binary.

TRAVON FREE

Age: 34

Location: Los Angeles

Occupation: TV/movie writer; comedian

Status: single

Bisexual is not an exclusion of anything else; I will literally date anyone. The term implies two but also everything else under that umbrella of identity.

GRAHAM ROEBUCK

Age: 30

Location: Toronto

Occupation: sales (eyewear industry)

Status: dating a gender-nonconforming person

I think there’s value in *bisexual* as a reclaimed term, because at a certain point it was used disparagingly. To take that term and own it, I think there’s power in that.

ON COMING OF AGE

FREE: Where I grew up, in Compton, you don’t want to be anything

but straight. I knew as a child I was different, but I didn't have a word for it; I didn't have any way of even knowing what it was. The world is built to tell you that boys like girls and girls like boys, so because that felt natural too, it didn't feel like I was pretending. But then you get to high school—I remember seeing a guy and being like, I kind of see him the same way I see her. And because I didn't know anything about bisexuality, it was like, Am I gay? And then once I started having sex with my high school girlfriend, I was like, Well, it's *definitely* not that, but what is this other thing? There was no way to explore anything sexual with a boy where I was growing up, so it became a thing that just sat in my mind. I remember googling around and stumbling on *bisexuality*. I read the description and was like, Oh, maybe this is me. This feels like home.

JASON ELLIS

Age: 47

Location: Los Angeles

Occupation: SiriusXM radio host

Status: married to a woman

I had a crush on [Metallica frontman] James Hetfield, but I didn't want to have sex with him at all. It would be a complete ruiner if he were to take his pants off. But I definitely wanted to have sex with Olivia Newton-John and Joan Jett.

JACK MOORE

Age: 31

Location: Los Angeles

Occupation: writer and producer

Status: dating a woman

You go through those weird junior-high times where you're at a sleepover and they put on porn and there's a low-key circle jerk happening. I found myself more drawn to the other dudes jerking off than to whatever porn was on TV. So for a while you walk around with that rattling around in your head: *Am I gay? Am I gay? Am I gay? I must be gay.* Then at some point you think, No, I still really love watching straight porn. I would ask my gay friends, "You know that gay thing where you still love eating pussy?" and they would be like, "No, I do *not* know that thing." So instead of identifying as bi, you think, Well, maybe I'm going through a healthy experimentation phase. Then you're like, I'm straight but experienced. And then you realize, No, I still really wanna give blow jobs, and those things aren't mutually exclusive.

At some point, coming out as bisexual is less of a decision than it is throwing up your arms and being okay with all of the above. Sometimes the right answer is that there is no answer, or that it's all an answer. It's not this one moment where you're like, "Oh, I'm bisexual!" It's this long journey to a shoulder shrug.

ON COMING OUT

ROEBUCK: I live a double life a little bit. Heterosexuality is the assumed default, so it's easy to just let people assume that and accept the privileges that come along with it, but at the same time I wish it was easier to not have to do that. There have been a lot of times when I haven't been out at my workplace because I have a fear of not being believed or of people thinking I'm doing it for attention. I can sort of tell by people's attitudes that they might not react in a positive way, so I'm not going to bring it up. I'm trying to work on that.

ELLIS: Coming out was a very long process. I had someone tell me, "It's okay you're bi, but you better not tell anybody, because it'll end your business." I see where he was coming from: It was about people not being cool about it because I'm so hetero-looking. I'm into boxing, I have guns, I have children—all the things you're

not "supposed" to have. They just don't understand the other side. They're not trying to be mean. They'll say, "Whoa, you're fuckin' *what?*" But even that's hurtful.

MOORE: There were a few months when I went off the ladies altogether and was like, This is what it's like to be gay. But even then I never came out, because it still didn't feel right. The whole coming-out-as-bi process is this long, drawn-out thing of trying on hats and being like, No, this one doesn't quite fit right and neither does this one, until you're just like, Wow, I think I just like *all* the hats.

ON DATING AND RELATIONSHIPS

FREE: With women, it's having to reassure them that all the misconceptions they have about bi men just aren't true. It always feels like an interview, like an interrogation. It's not like I'm with you and I'm going to say, "You're great, but I'd really love a guy." Like I'm craving a burger or something—that's how they think it works! "I know I've been a vegetarian for a long time, but, man, I could go for a steak. It's been so long and there are so many steakhouses!" If I'm in love with you, and I'm dating you, that's what we're doing.

MOORE: I was literally called a faggot by a liberal woman I was on a date with in 2011 after she had just confessed to me that she was bisexual. I have to say I don't fault her, because I think she had a lot of internalized homophobia, but she essentially said, "It's different for boys, and you know that."

ELLIS: With guys, my dynamic is "You're my friend and we have sex." I can love you like I have love for my guy friends I don't have sex with, and if I sleep with a gay guy, we're just friends, not lovers.

MINOR: The idea that I'll leave a woman for a man is hilarious. It's just you trying to escape the fact that I'll leave you for *you*, which is the only reason I'm gonna leave.

ON ERASURE

ROEBUCK: I think a lot of times people assume that if you're in a straight-presenting relationship you're somehow not bisexual anymore—or in the opposite sense, that you've picked a side. But that's not how it works. My sexual identity doesn't change depending on who I'm dating; it remains the same.

MOORE: The number of gay men who say to me, "Oh, honey, I was bi for a little bit; you'll come around," infuriates me. And then I have bisexual friends who are more femme, and *nobody* believes them. People look at me and are like, "Yeah, he wants to talk to me about LeBron James—that's something a woman-fucker would say." Whereas with one of my friends who's much femmier, people are like, "Oh no, he's definitely gay." Don't presume to know what somebody wants.

MINOR: I've doubted it, and I've had it doubted by other people. Doubting my sexuality is the same to me as doubting my blackness. When you're in a marginalized group based on external factors, you don't get the choice. Especially in black culture: If you suck dick, you're gay. Period. You will be responded to, reacted to and treated as gay. You can question all these things, but does it change how you're responded to? I can feel white all day, but I'm still gonna be black.

ON COMMUNITY

MOORE: It's hard to be bisexual. Straight people don't really want you and gay people don't really want you, so it's easier to be closeted about it. Sometimes it's easier to identify as gay when you're with a man and as straight when you're with a woman,

“I GET TO WALK OUTSIDE EVERY DAY AND KNOW THAT MY LOVE ISN’T LIMITED TO MALE OR FEMALE, AND THAT IT ALLOWS ME TO SEE SO MUCH BEAUTY IN SO MANY PEOPLE.”

because who would want to be lost between gay people and straight people who are telling you that you don’t exist?

FREE: I personally don’t feel I have a community within the community. I see so many things done in the name of LGBTQ events and fund-raisers and all types of things, but no one acknowledges the fact that everything gays and lesbians feel in terms of stressors, mental health and things like suicide are experienced multiple times over by bi people, because they don’t have a community within the straight community and they don’t have a community within their own community—with the people who should be accepting and protecting them.

ELLIS: I don’t feel connected to the community at all. I *want* to be more a part of it, because I don’t see people who look like me out there talking. There *is* a community in there. Most of the time it’s organized adults having a really good time, and I feel like people don’t even know about it. I’m so happy I’ve gotten to experience that, because if I had stayed closed off maybe I never would have understood how much enjoyment I could have in my life.

ON VISIBILITY

MOORE: This is changing, but for a long time my line for this was “I’m the only bisexual man I know, but I’ve fucked a lot of straight guys.” It’s getting better, but that’s still the situation for the most part.

MINOR: I believe that as a culture, men are conditioned to hide [their bisexual desires], and they’re stubborn enough to do it for their entire lives. I believe that hundreds of thousands of men who have the potential to be in love and live their best life and have plenty of same-sex experiences will just go without it because of conditioning and whatnot. So in practice, I don’t see a lot of bi men.

FREE: I’ve always felt that if I have to die for my identity, I’m okay with that. If you’re going to be visible, on some level you have to make peace with that. To me, the silence is worse, because if we remain silent, it allows their voices to grow. I think we’ve made the progress we’ve made because we’ve refused to be silent.

I’m not even saying don’t be afraid. Feel the fear and walk

through it, because every time you’ve come out the other side unscathed or breathing, you’ve gotten that much stronger. When people say things like “Be fearless and be brave,” it’s like, no—you can be fearful, but do it anyway.

ON FREEDOM

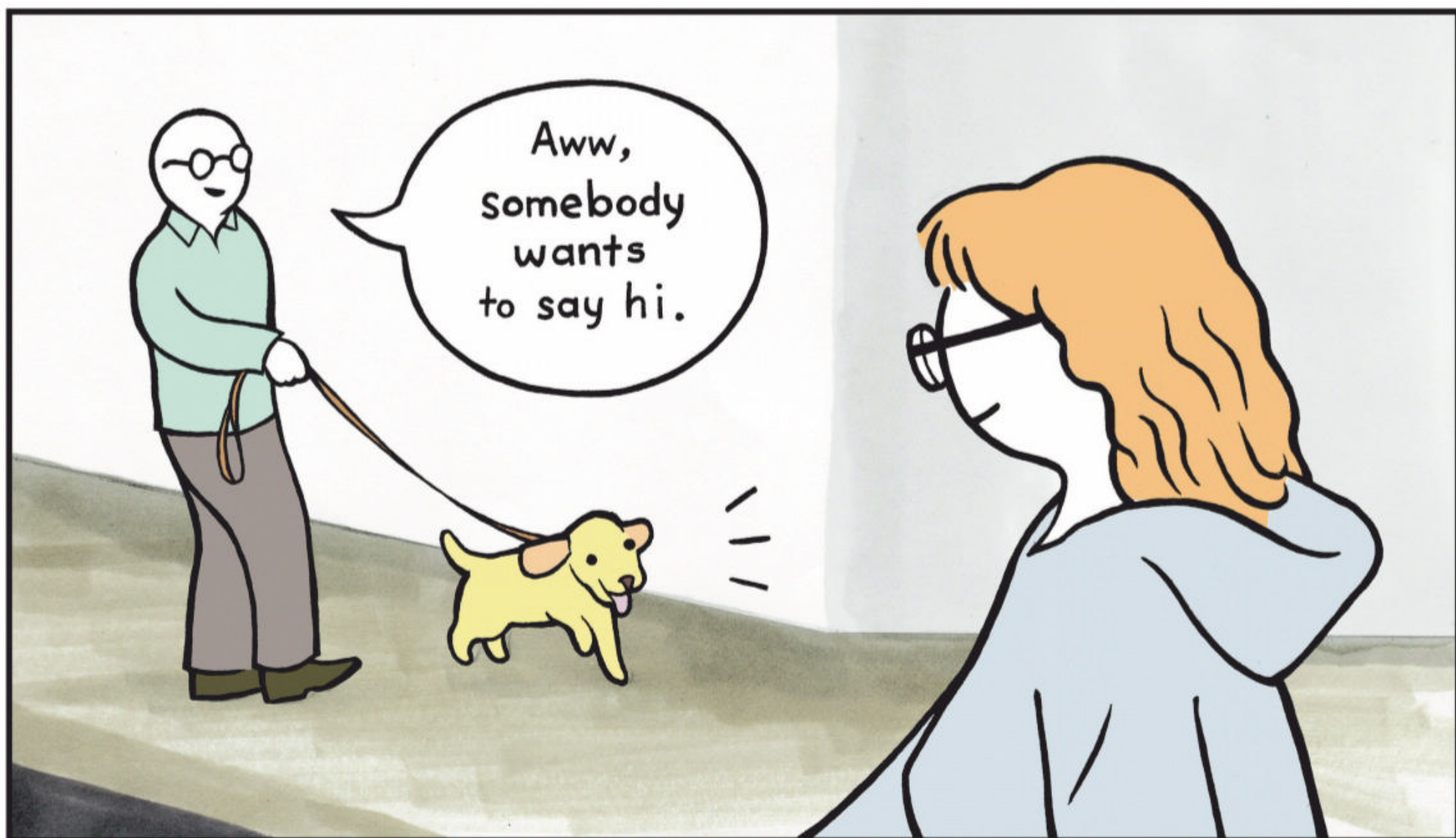
FREE: I love that I get to experience the best of men and women. I love that I get to walk outside every day and know that my love isn’t limited to male or female, and that it allows me to see so much beauty in so many people who identify as so many things across the spectrum. I feel the world is so much more beautiful to me because I’m not stuck in one camp.

ROEBUCK: I think having accepted my own bisexuality has led me down a path of being more accepting of other gender expressions and all sorts of things, and I think it’s been really healthy. I started painting my nails recently. I’m not brave enough to wear it to work, but I do it on my days off. It has let me think of new ways to express myself, I guess. I don’t have to be pigeonholed into one path of what masculinity can be.

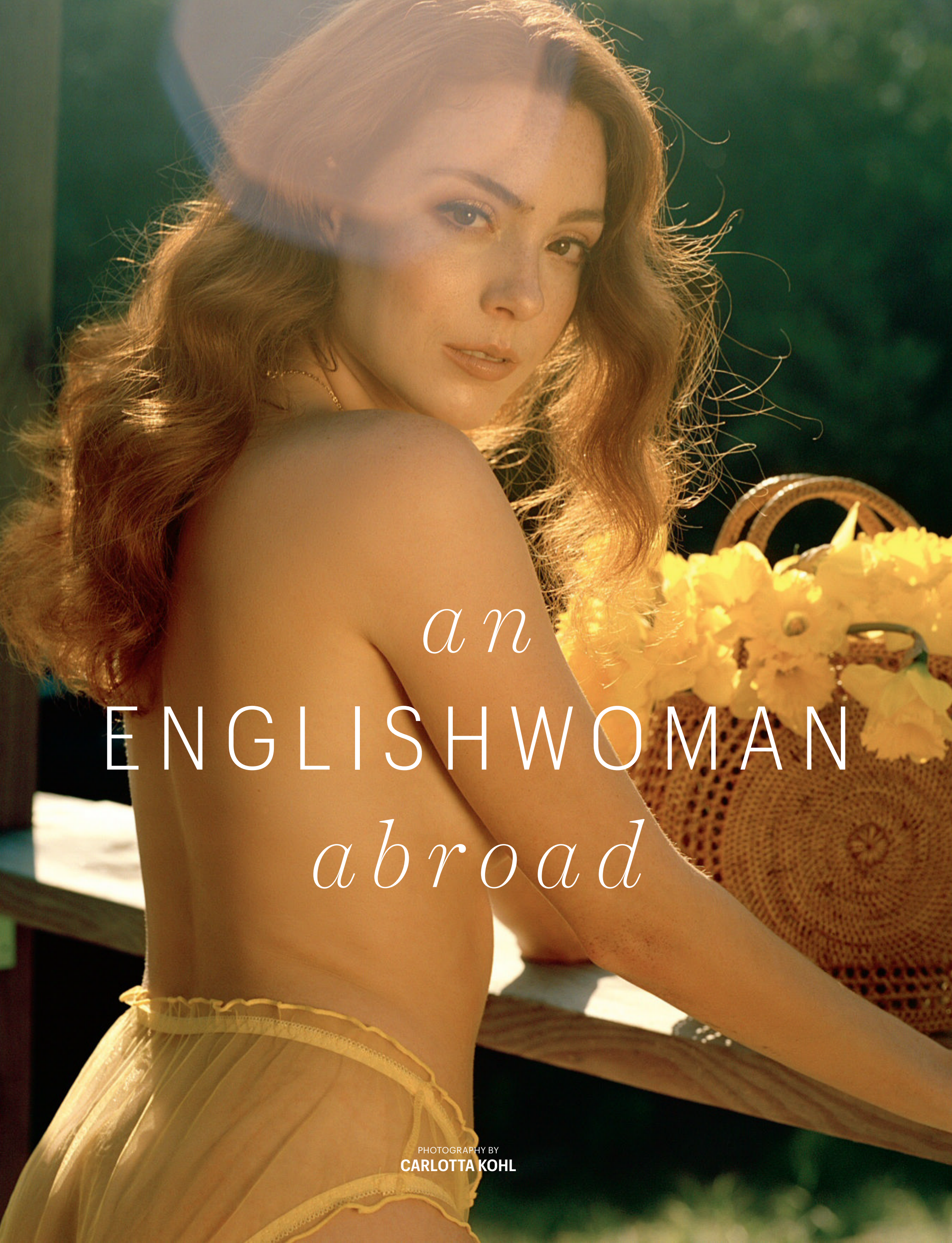
MINOR: I’m an equal-opportunity ho! I don’t have to play a character. I’m showing up in my sweatshirt and bucket hat, and I just might be kissing a guy, I might be kissing a girl, I might be kissing a neither, and that’s just what’s up. Same bucket hat, different partner, and people appreciate that because it contributes to the visual of what bi means. You don’t have to always present it, which hopefully gets across the message that you can’t assume. I kind of like that I pass as straight and I’ll walk in and be like, “Yeah, suckin’ dick was crazy.”

MOORE: People always use that Maya Angelou quote “When someone tells you who they are, believe them” to talk about evil people, but I want to flip that on its head and make it about bisexuality. When someone tells you who they are, believe them. Don’t act like you know better, because you definitely don’t.

ELLIS: If I had to [pretend to be straight], I would break. Something would break. I’ve done that. I can’t not be me. I like hanging out with my kids, I like the sun, I like skateboarding, I like having sex with guys. A lot. That’s my thing—you can’t take that away from me. It’s who I am. ■



NICHOLAS GUREWITCH



an
ENGLISHWOMAN
abroad

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
CARLOTTA KOHL



STYLING BY KELLEY ASH

SEPTEMBER PLAYMATE





September Playmate **Sophie O'Neil** grew up in rural England, and yet she crowned her very first trip to America with a Topanga idyll that would make the most die-hard West Coaster blush

I live in a borough outside London called Bexley. It's a nice place, and everyone here is really lovely, but it's a bit quiet—not too much going on. I don't think I could stay here. I'm all about exploring.

When I was younger I secretly wanted to be a model, but I would never admit it to anyone because I didn't want people to say, "Really? *You* want to model?" I'm quite shy, and I've never been very confident in myself and how I look. I'm also only five-foot-five, so my height has always been an issue. Whenever I thought about trying it, I would think, Nope, they're going to tear me down.

I went to university in Brighton, which is by the sea and very quirky—completely different from Bexley. I studied theatrical hair and makeup for film and TV, and after I left uni I was on Instagram, looking for makeup work, and photographers started asking me, "Can you model?" I was like, "Uh, I can try." And it just kind of happened from there.

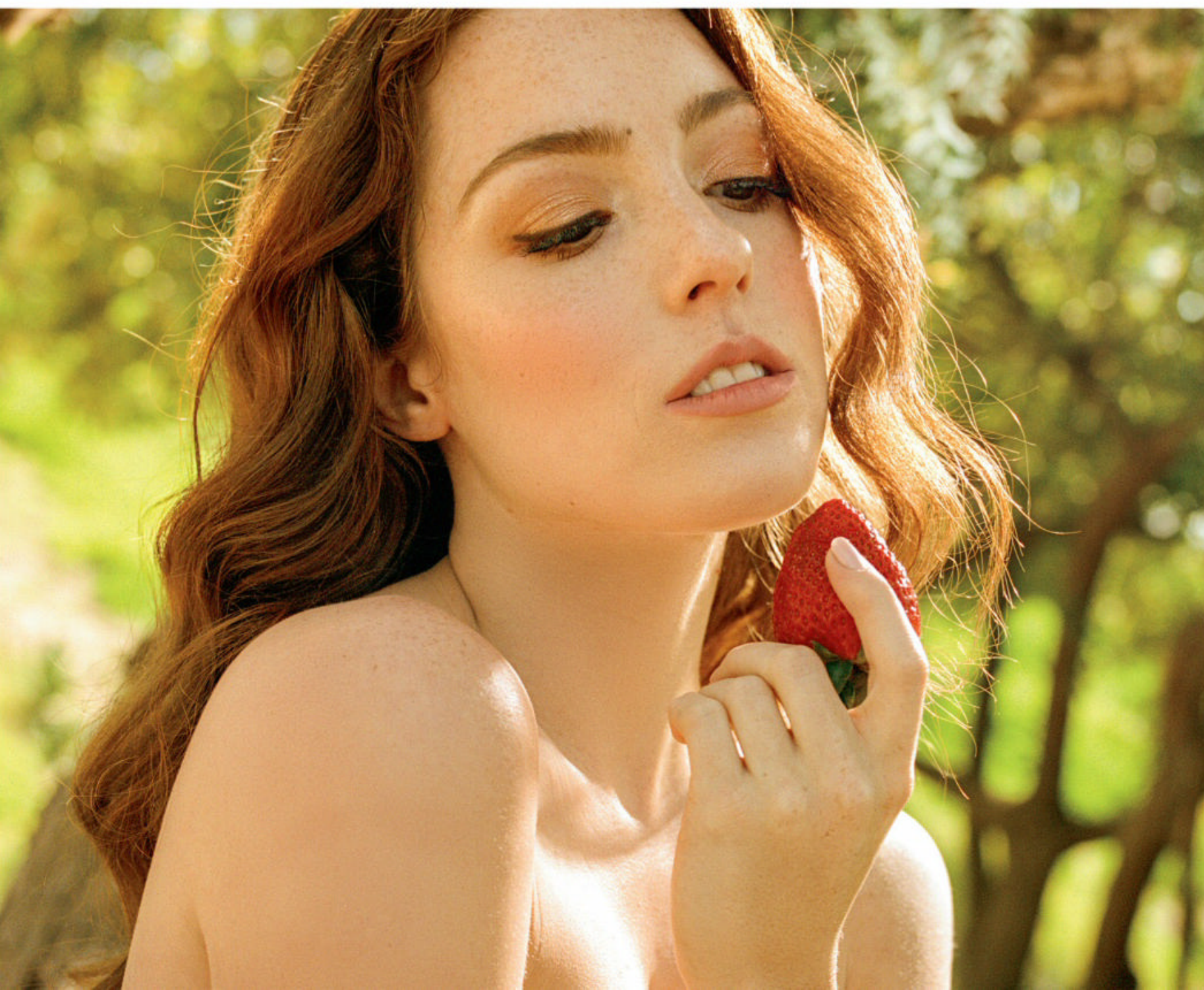
At the time I wasn't sure if I liked it, but I gradually realized I was doing more modeling than anything else. Eventually I started to enjoy it and to think of it as a

career. I've been modeling for about a year now, and it wasn't until the end of January 2019 that I got signed to an agency. A big part of it was timing: Maybe it could have happened for me a year ago, but I don't think I was confident enough to sign a contract back then.

The more experience I've gained, the more confident I've become. I'm lucky to have had good opportunities, but I also worked for it. For a while I was researching names and agencies, making connections and messaging people, asking if they'd be up for some shooting.

The biggest challenge is still just believing in myself. Obviously I wouldn't be doing what I do if I wasn't comfortable in my body, but we all have our bad days. When it comes to a job, I feel like the key is to move whatever you're feeling to the side and just get on with it and be grateful that you've got the opportunity to be there—and to have fun!

Looking back, it was weird how it all came about. But I'm so glad it did, and I can't wait to see what will happen for me in the future.











DATA SHEET



BIRTHPLACE AND CURRENT RESIDENCE: Bexley, U.K.

ON PARENTAL GUIDANCE

My mom and dad are very supportive of what I do; they just don't want me to do anything I might regret later. My mom was like, "Are you *sure* you want to pose in *PLAYBOY*?" I said, "Yeah, I'm confident doing it. I wouldn't do it if I wasn't." Then they were like, "Are you sure it's the *real* *PLAYBOY*?" I said, "Yes, Mom, yes, Dad, it's the *real* *PLAYBOY*." My dad told me, "If you want to do it, do it. It's a good opportunity."

ON MOMS AND MYSTERIES

I like murder-mystery shows, which is weird, actually, because I used to watch them with my nan and my mom. And when I was younger we always played—have you heard of *Cluedo*? I used to think I was really good at it, so I secretly wanted to be a detective.

ON WANDERLUST

I'm all about finding new places and

seeing amazing views. I've been on family holidays in Greece, so I've been to Santorini, Crete, Rhodes and quite a few other islands. I'd always wanted to see L.A., and I was able to during my *PLAYBOY* shoot near Malibu. What I saw was lovely; I can't wait to go back.

ON INSTA KISMET

It just helped me get where I am now. Playboy would never have reached out to me if it weren't for Instagram. I think if you're a famous person it's probably hard to know what *not* to share, because people expect you to share so much. It's a good thing, but people can definitely take it too far.

ON TROLLS

I've fortunately not had to deal with it that much, but when people are mean on social media, I want to say, "What good is that doing you? It's not going to make you feel any better just

because you think someone shouldn't look like this. I know everyone has an opinion, but why did you feel you had to share the unnecessary comment about my legs?"

ON FUNNY FRIENDS

I'm most like Rachel from *Friends* because I can be quite ditsy; I have my moments. But my favorite character is probably Joey because he's so funny. He also seems like he just has fun with life. That's what I want to be like.

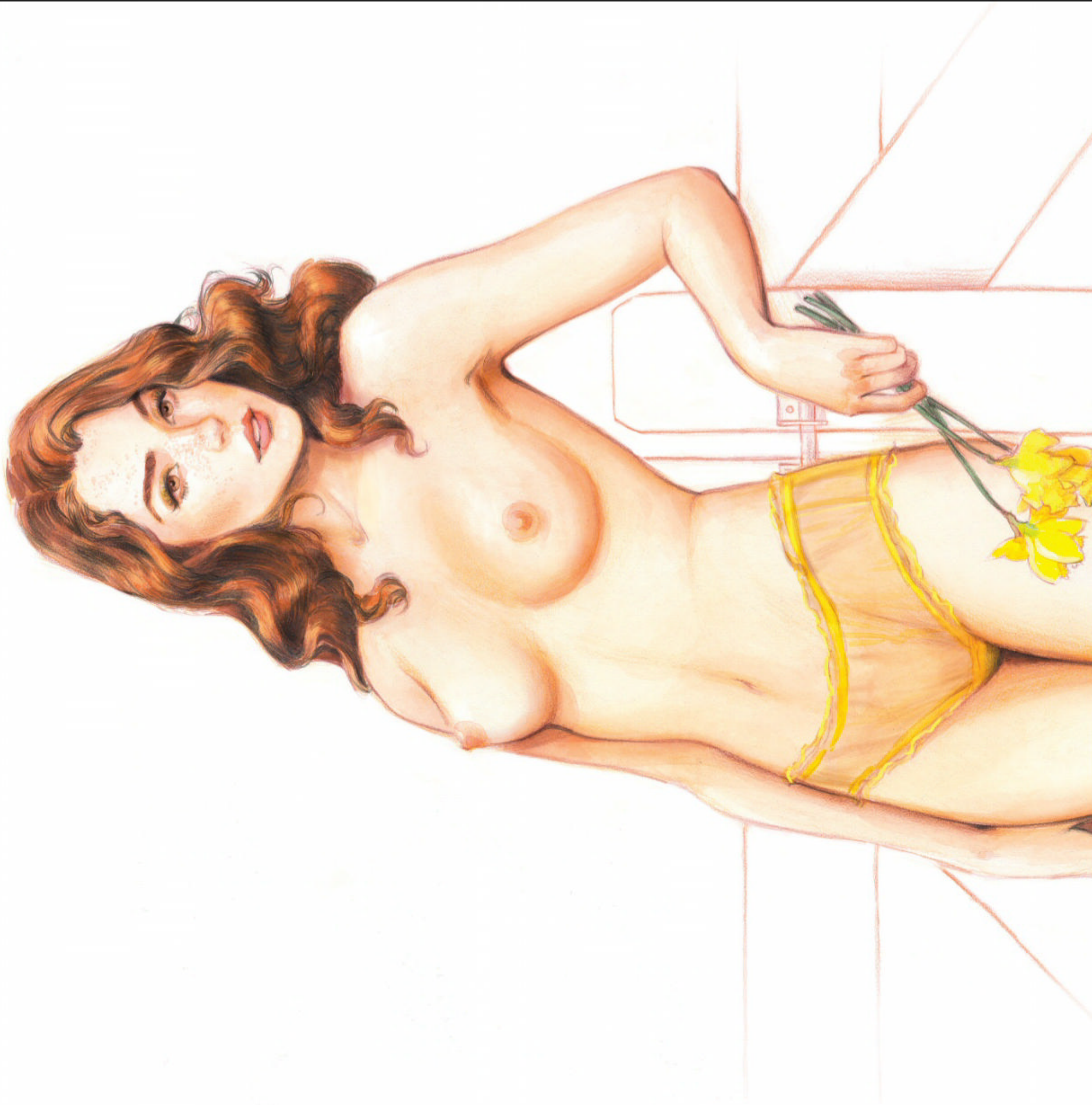
ON DOPPELGÄNGERS

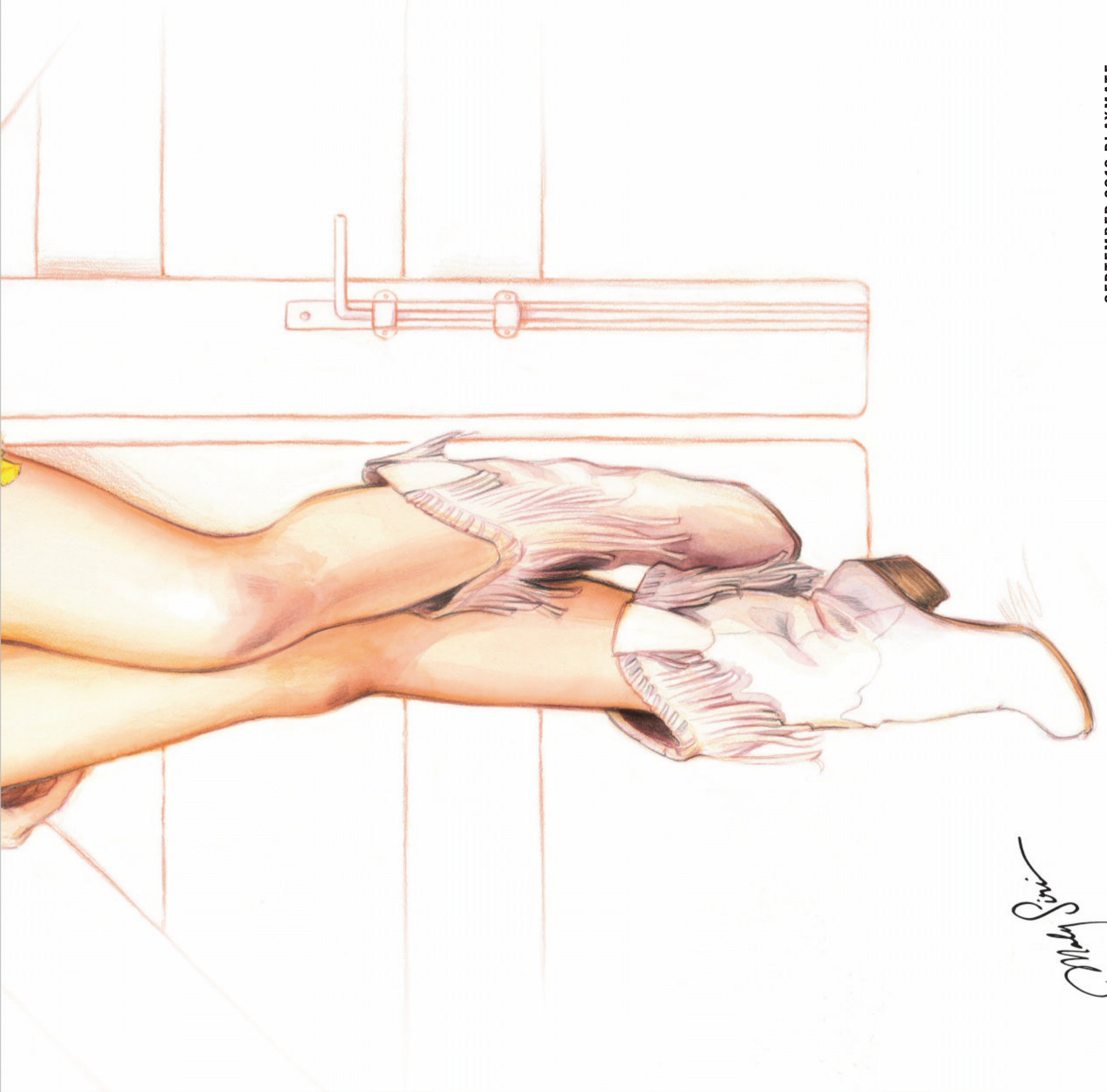
People have said I resemble Kate Beckinsale, but I think it's only the way she looks in *Pearl Harbor*. (That's one of my favorite films, and it's the only one that can make me cry.) And back at university I was pale and had red hair and people actually used to say to me, "You look like Victoria from *Twilight*." So—the bad one.

Imai





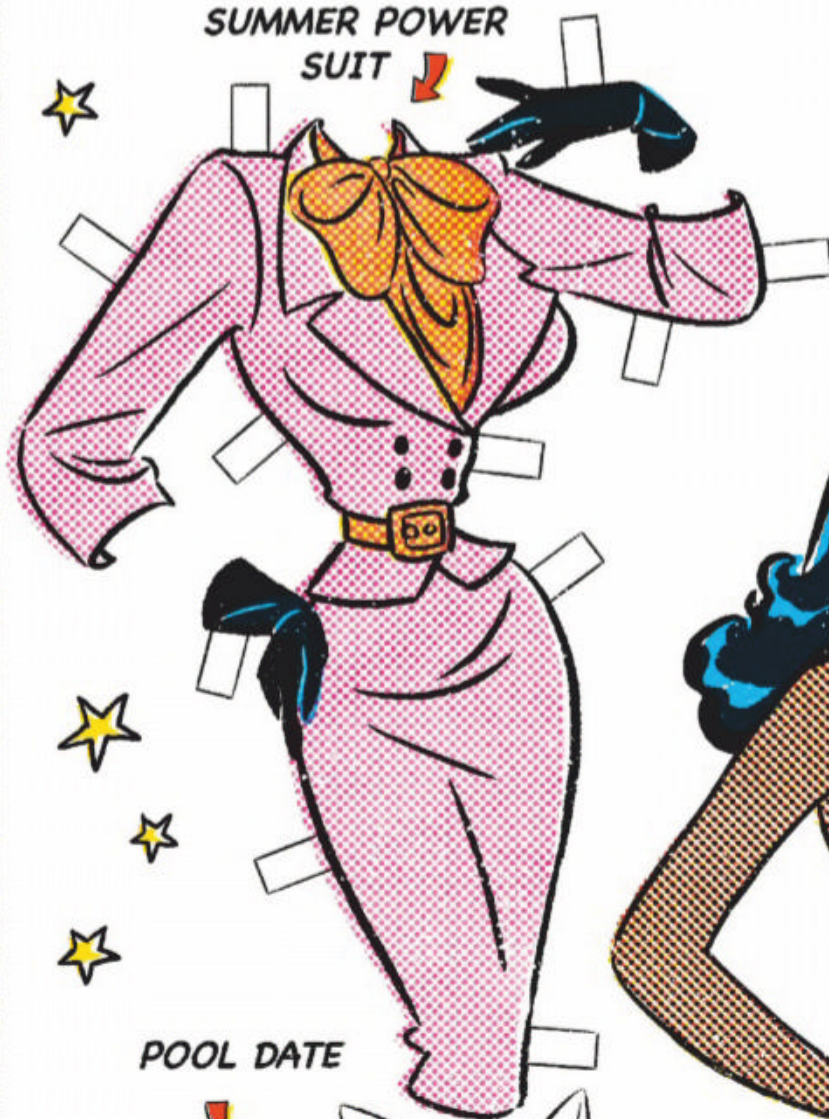




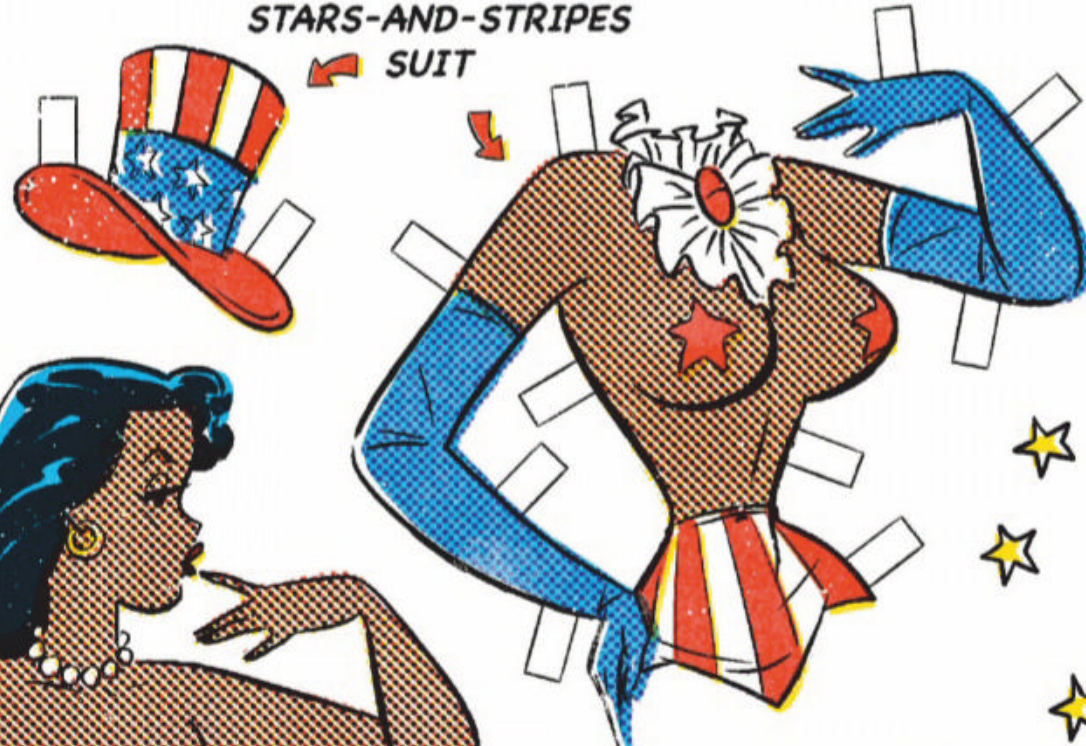
Mindy Givir

Bombshell SUMMER FASHIONS

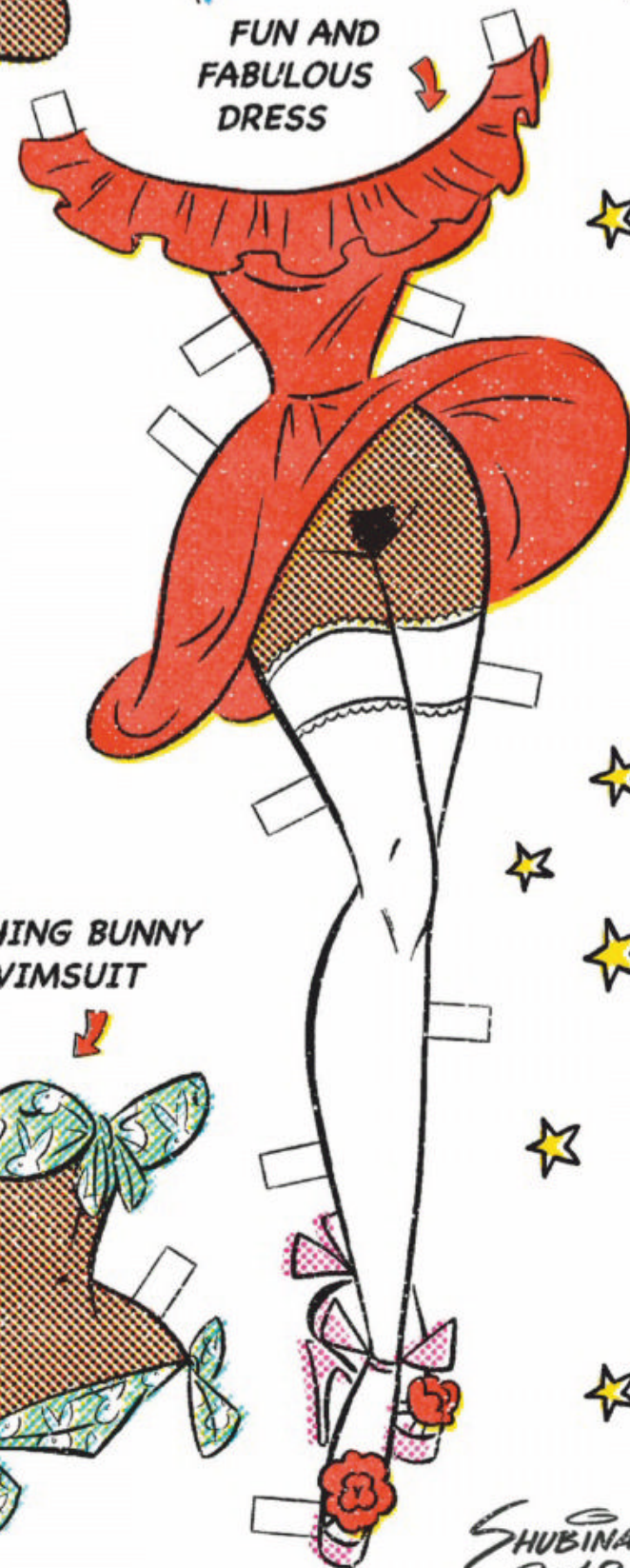
SUMMER POWER
SUIT



STARS-AND-STRIPES
SUIT



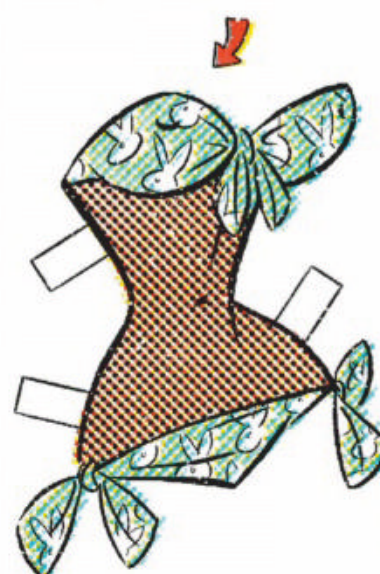
FUN AND
FABULOUS
DRESS



POOL DATE



BATHING BUNNY
SWIMSUIT



SUMMER LUAU
SKIRT



SHUBINA.
2019

THE PLAYBOY SYMPOSIUM

PLAYBOY guest editor **Matt McGorry** invites
four distinct voices to explore the changing
dynamics of power and sexuality

ART BY FAVIANNA RODRIGUEZ



Growing up, I didn't think much about my gender and the effect it had on my life. How things have changed: As I sit here writing this just after turning 33, I'm able to look back and see the many ways who I am has been shaped by what was expected of me, as a boy and then as a man. A lifetime of striving to fit into society's expectations of manhood had stripped me of so much of my humanity that I couldn't even recognize it at the time. I signed a bad contract. And now I'm lighting that shit on fire.

Until five years ago, I'd never read the fine print of this contract. I signed it, like most of us do, without considering the negative impact of everything deemed "just the way things are." Unfortunately, people following patterns they see as the norm have been the cause of many of the world's greatest injustices. Going with the flow can grant us power and social standing, but at what cost to ourselves and others?

It didn't take long for me to realize that having 17.5-inch arms and an almost 600-pound dead lift caused people to look at me in a way that made me feel powerful—not just physically but socially as well. In a culture that teaches men to be dominant, I found myself building a body and a persona that would demand respect by being "better" than others. I did this often at the expense of my humanity and integrity. For all the time many of us men spend trying to be "good enough" or "better than," when was the last time we saw a man apply the same effort to becoming more honest and compassionate? At the root of these extraordinary human qualities is the ability to be vulnerable, a quality too often seen as weak and "unmanly," something most of us are taught to avoid at all costs. Going against the grain can be costly, but not nearly as costly as slowly bludgeoning our own humanity into submission.

We all know the rules in the bold-type section of the male contract. I, like many of you, had learned them so well that they just felt natural. Being respectful of women doesn't necessarily give us the same social power as hooking up as often as possible and then feeling the affirmation of the head nods we get when telling other guys about it. Like most boys, I was taught we should get as far as girls would let us. I was taught our worth depended on our ability to deliver. Not knowing about sex, not being confident about it and not wanting it were never options. And so, in making our sexual relationships a determinant of our social value, we learned to dehumanize women to fulfill what was expected of us. Many of us lied to our friends about getting to third base, boasted about whom we'd hooked up with and never actually asked for permission to go further. We didn't ask because we didn't want to be seen as unsure, or perhaps because we didn't know or didn't care how hard it is for most women to have to say no. Our expectations of women and our own drive to "conquer" led us to give them the culturally recognizable labels of "tease" and "prude" when they didn't do what we wanted. And then we would shame them by calling them "sluts" and "hos" for doing the same things boys and men did—things that made us "players" and "pimps."

Once I began to recognize the double standards of sexism, I entered the fight for gender equity, thinking I was doing it for

women. I soon realized I was doing it for myself and other men. The roles we're expected to play based on our gender are damaging to everyone. Patriarchy is a social system of male domination that harms women and those who identify as gender nonconforming. But it also hurts men: It forces our allegiance to a system that will never allow us to be truly free, that insists we remain dominant and in control. The contract requires that we cut off and numb integral parts of ourselves so we're incapable of fully knowing and expressing our emotions, or of being whole. How can we have integrity and be true to our values if we're expected to uphold our end of this oppressive bargain?

I've succeeded in many of the ways men in our culture are taught to aspire to. I've had success in my career as an actor, earning fame and a decent paycheck. I was a nationally ranked powerlifter. And yet I was left with profound insecurity and a sense of emptiness. How could it be any other way when my self-worth relied on having to prove myself over and over again?

Mutual liberation was the antidote to my despair. I wholeheartedly believe that when we're our best selves, we fight for what is right even when we know we'll get pushback. Courage and integrity require this of us. I have gone through a reorientation of my heart and soul, and I know that the work of growing to understand myself better, and to effect positive change, will never be complete. Reclaiming my humanity is dependent on resisting societal pressures that tell me to conform to the status quo, that tell me to be silent about injustice and to normalize oppression, hate and even my own deep-seated biases.

Take a moment to picture the "all-American man." If you're like most people, you visualize someone who looks like me: a straight, white, cisgender man with a "strong build." Over time, I learned how this default image had impacted my life and given me false confidence in my ability to be objective. If, while growing up, I never had to think much about what it meant to be a man, I certainly didn't think much about what it meant to be white. When we're in the dominant group, we rarely have to examine how our identities impact our survival, the way LGBTQ people, women, people of color, poor people and disabled people do.

In order for us to stand a chance at claiming our full humanity and embodying an expansive and inclusive worldview, we must be willing to go out of our way. We've grown up in a culture that teaches us to devalue the perspectives of the most marginalized. I did this for most of my life without even realizing it. But if we're ever to create a world where everyone is truly valued, safe and free, we must learn to listen to the voices from the farthest margins. We must assume the same, if not higher, levels of competency and objectivity in those who don't fit the image of the "all-American man."

It is my honor to bring in four leaders whose voices, perspectives and brilliance need to be heard. By listening, with open hearts and open minds, we will grow to better understand others, the world we live in and, ultimately, ourselves.

In the words of one of my sheroes, Angela Davis, "I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I am changing the things I cannot accept."

*Matt McGorry is an activist and actor known for roles on *Orange Is the New Black* and *How to Get Away With Murder*.*

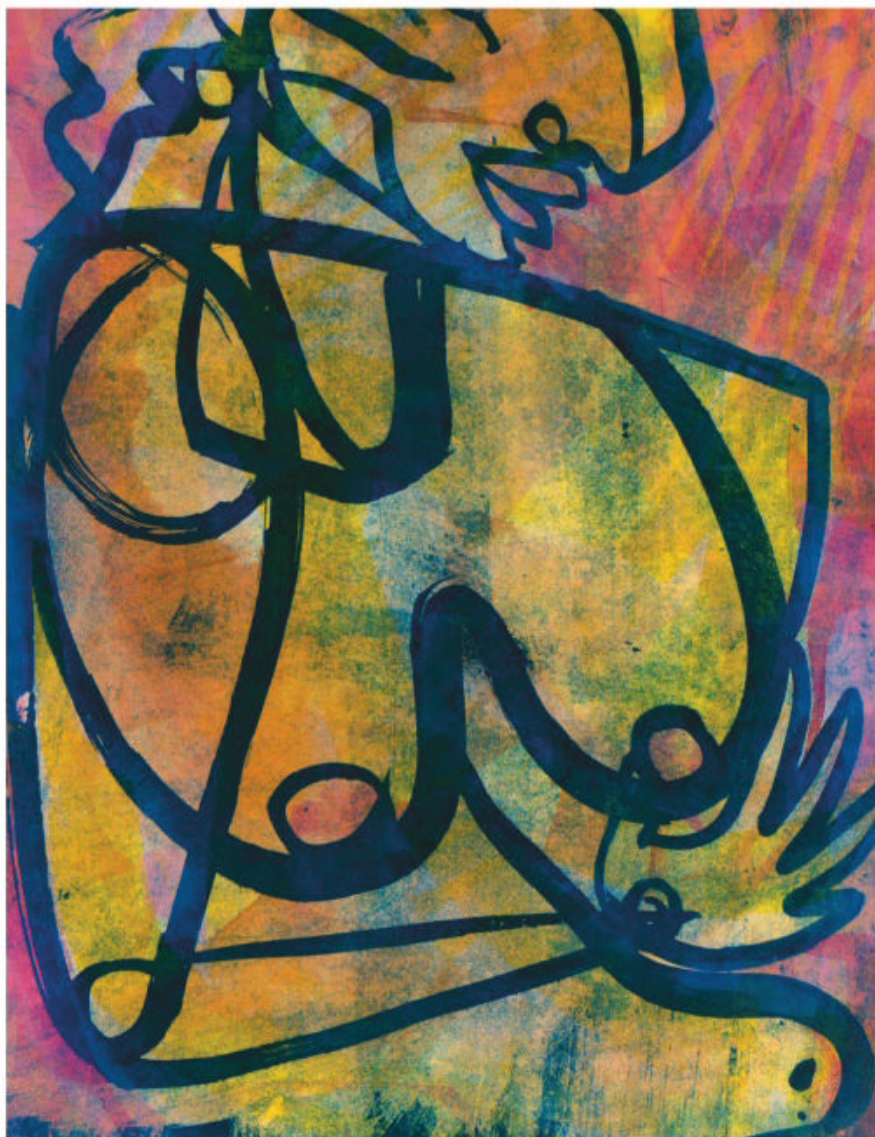


A FAT BLACK POLITICS OF DESIRE

BY **SONYA RENEE TAYLOR**

When the Australian reporter called to ask me my thoughts on the article and photos in *PLAYBOY* featuring pop singer Lizzo, I promptly put the journalist on hold and googled the pics. I love Lizzo, but the thought of perusing a *PLAYBOY* magazine had not occurred to me since 1991, when I “found” a decade’s worth of old issues stacked in my uncle’s dresser drawers like bars of gold. Snooping through his things when he lived in our basement was a regular activity of mine, particularly because he had so much porn. Thumbing through those pages, I learned everything and nothing about my own sexuality, my own desirability.

Desire, according to my uncle’s magazines, was blonde, clean-shaven, thin and white. Desire was red lips and a pouting mouth, and desire appeared to always be posing suggestively...with fruit. Uncle had other magazines. They were explicit and crass: black girls with pendulous breasts squirting milk or sprawling spread-eagle with their fingers rambling through thick black pubic hair. Every running joke I’d ever heard about *PLAYBOY* seemed to focus on how people read it “for the articles,” an allusion to the supposedly more sophisticated palate the magazine was said to cater to. Erudite people read *PLAYBOY*. Those tasteful people (read: men)



The fat black woman’s body has always been a marvel—even when the world found it grotesque, it found it spectacular.

didn’t want smut; they wanted beauty and class. They wanted thin, white, clean-shaven visions of desire. If the women in *PLAYBOY* were classy and beautiful, by default the women in the other magazines, the women with skin and hair like mine, must be smut. Dark girls were carnal but not desired. They were indeed objects of lust but not of beauty. If what I deduced about desire and beauty from these magazines was true, then what would I, could I, be as a sexual being in this body?

The fat black woman’s body has always been a marvel—even when the world found it grotesque, it found it spectacular. When Sarah “Saartjie” Baartman was abducted and enslaved by European colonizers to be exhibited naked in a cage beside a baby rhinoceros, it was the epic swell of her butt and thighs, her pronounced labia and deep brown complexion that induced white folks to pay their money to gawk at her. This is what fat black girls like me came to expect for our bodies. I knew men might watch my ass sway beneath a sundress when I walked to the corner store in July. Men would spit their hunger toward me, spectators graciously detailing the myriad ways they would consume this prey set in motion before them. Of course it was my duty to appreciate that someone might want to devour me, that someone might want this undesirable body.

Not until I saw myself reflected in the brilliant tapestry of other black women—women I desired—did I begin to see desire and beauty as possible in my own being. But those women were not in magazine spreads. They were in kitchens in Oakland and Baltimore. I met them in mediation circles and at marches. Black women pouring into the streets to protest the murders of unarmed black bodies—it was in these sacred spaces that I saw how we are lovers and healers, desired and wholly beautiful. It was black women who told me I was a being of magnificence and sumptuous delight, and it wasn’t until I began believing them that I was truly liberated into the fullness of a sexuality formed of my own definitions. Lizzo is gorgeous in her spread, but she is we—fat black girls have always been worthy of desire and respect, and we never needed a magazine to tell us that.

*Sonya Renee Taylor is founder of the Body Is Not an Apology movement and author of *The Body Is Not an Apology: The Power of Radical Self-Love*.*

ON NONTOXIC MASCULINITY

BY **RICHIE RESEDA**

By the time most of us are 12, we've punched someone for pride, lied about sex for cool cred and called another boy "gay" for not being "man enough." This is what toxic masculinity teaches us—that we're measured by our physical prowess, by how much money we make and how many womxn we "have." (*Womxn* is a spelling many feminists use instead of *women*, to recognize the independence of womxn from men.) But what do we do when we're ready to ditch these chains?

Consent doesn't start in the bedroom—it starts with the first glance. Feeling attracted to someone doesn't entitle me to stare, linger or look them up and down. Contrary to what music videos and middle school taught me, it's not sexy—it's creepy. Just like it's not okay to express sexuality with my body to people who aren't down, it's not okay to express it with my face either.

The same goes for my mouth. Toxic masculinity dictates that I verbally express sexualized appraisal at all times, that these are "compliments." But they're not. Rather than assume people want to talk at all, I've found it's best to ask for permission and start with regular conversation. "Hi, can I talk to you?" works great. And if they say no, well, that means no.

I sometimes struggle with the idea that my manhood, and therefore my value, doesn't originate in my wallet. I drive a 1992 Acura Integra that looks like it once decorated a telephone pole. It gets me where I need to go without problems, but I feel embarrassed.

The toxic devil on my shoulder tells me that I should be in a Model S, that driving a more expensive car would make me bigger, more powerful, more "manly." To escape this mythology, I remember that I'm not valued by what I make but by what I give. Driving a sensible car gives me the freedom to support friends and family financially when need be, and to donate to causes I believe in. This reminds me that my purpose is to help, not to ball out.

Getting man points for physically dominating others with athleticism or violence is another tough one to shake. It's insidious, because I know choosing not to play this domination game can get me hurt, or at least ridiculed with insults that liken me to "weak" people like womxn and queer folks.

Combating this takes courage, dedication and tolerance for discomfort. When someone "disrespects" me or the people I'm

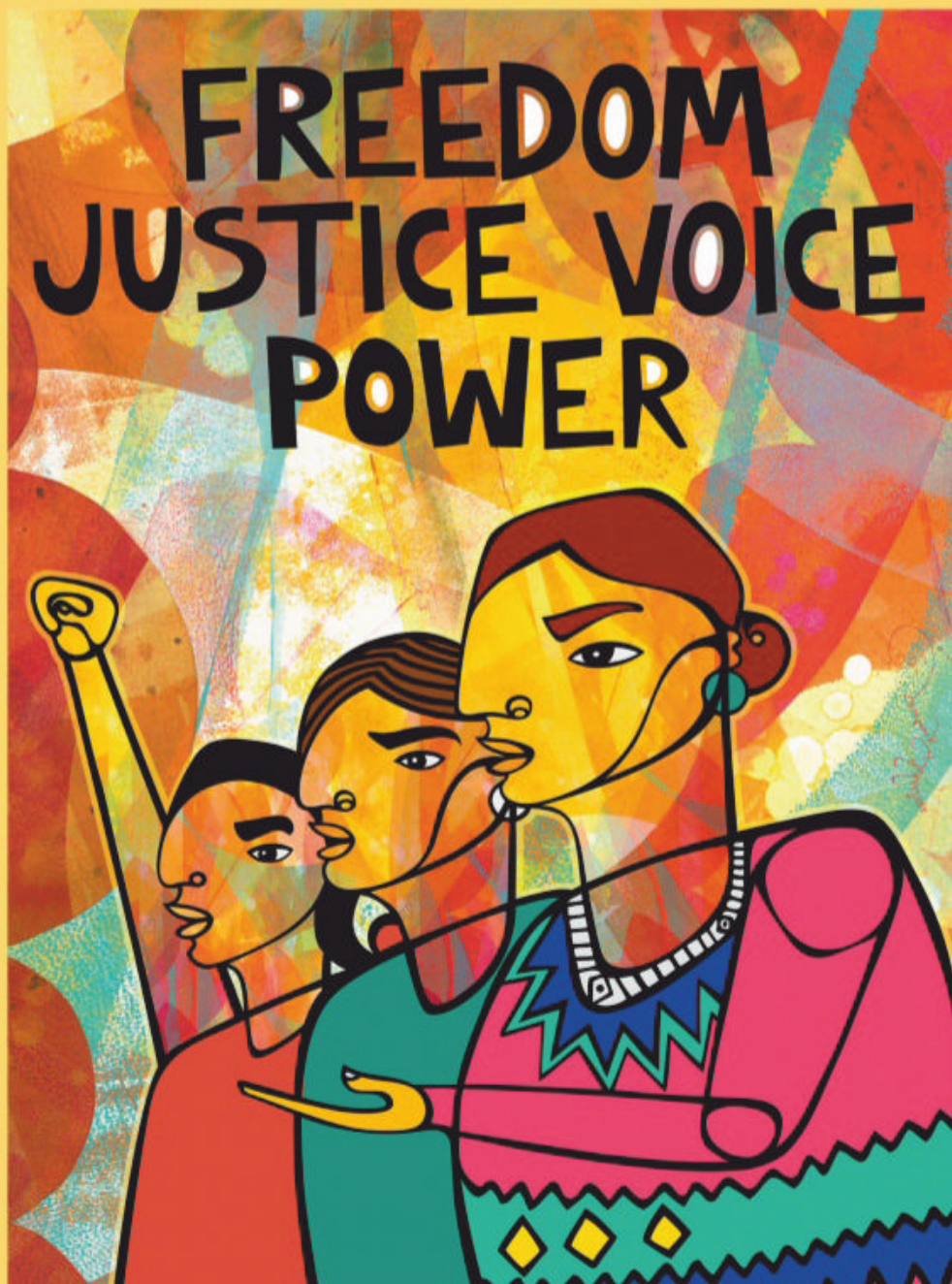
with, I must have the confidence to resist the urge to bark back, get revenge or "come out on top." I instead seek resolution and prioritize safety. This doesn't guarantee I'll be safe, but neither does violence.

Today, this is revolutionary—to pursue solutions instead of domination. But it's vital. Violence escalates when I fight fire with fire rather than with water. Fighting with water doesn't mean allowing myself to be victimized; it means the opposite. The nontoxic way to deal with conflict is to solve problems rather than to "prove myself."

This is why toxic masculinity is easy. It means going with the flow and being cool with it when the river cascades off a mountain. Nontoxic masculinity is hard. It means swimming upstream...but it beats falling off a cliff.

*Richie Reseda is a formerly incarcerated feminist, organizer and producer of Indigo Mateo's 2019 album, *Intuition*.*





ON PRIVILEGE AND FREEDOM —

BY **MUNROE BERGDORF**

We are living in a time of social recalibration. Our understanding of oppressive structures has never been as widely acknowledged, discussed or deconstructed within the mainstream as it is today. The language we use for this is expanding, thanks to decades of thought put to paper, largely by womxn, people of color and the LGBTQ community, about what it means to be seen as “less than” by those who hold social power.

Discussions surrounding race, gender identity, sexual orientation and other factors have helped us identify which cross-sections of society are most likely to be placed at a social disadvantage. These conversations have benefited greatly from the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, a leading American scholar of critical race theory who coined the term *intersectionality* in the late 1980s; today, intersectional feminism recognizes the political and social disparities that impact our identities. The experience of an upper-class, white, cisgender, heterosexual woman will differ from that of a working-class, black, transgender, queer woman. And in understanding that difference

in experience, we can understand and pinpoint systems of oppression such as racism, transphobia and sexism in a more nuanced way.

It wasn’t until I discovered Crenshaw’s work that I felt truly close to feminism—I found so much of the feminist theory I had been exposed to either dismissive of womxn who hadn’t been assigned female at birth, or focused primarily on the needs and experiences of Western white womxn. I craved a branch of feminism that took into consideration the fact that womxn don’t come in one form. We all have different stories, different struggles and different lessons to teach one another, so it’s vital that the womxn’s liberation movement reflect that.

Intersectional feminism allows us to see who holds power within society through the lens of privilege—a word often used in discussions of social justice today. Privilege is the recognition that some of us are afforded a head start by virtue of our identity. Privilege doesn’t mean your life has been easy; it just means it would have been harder had you also been born X. It’s important to recognize that privilege isn’t fixed, just as our identities aren’t fixed—we change as human beings throughout our lives, and so may our social privilege.

With all this language being adopted into the mainstream consciousness, it’s important to note that this expanded terminology isn’t necessarily new. It originated largely from conversations that have been going on within marginalized communities for a long time. The fact that you may not have heard them until now is due largely to the historic lack of diverse voices within the mainstream, and limited discussion of racism and prejudice in a real, nuanced way from the perspective of those who experience them. Terms such as *mansplaining*, *cultural appropriation*, *white guilt*, *heteronormativity* and *cisgender* help us disestablish certain behaviors and identities as “normal,” thus allowing those who are marginalized not to be seen as “other.” Being straight and cisgender may be common, but common isn’t the same as normal. There’s power in the language we choose, and there’s freedom in our willingness to understand how it affects others who don’t have what we have.

It would have been hard to imagine even 10 years ago the conversations we’re now having about our different experiences in society. Maybe we got too comfortable within the boundaries of our privilege, or numb within our oppression. But if we’ve learned anything since the start of the #MeToo movement, it’s that we must never be complacent, because those who would wind back our freedom of choice, expression and identity are anything but. We must stay active, we must stay vocal, we must stay informed. In the quest for equality, we must be conscious of what we’re striving to be equal with and certain that we don’t repeat the oppressive behavior of some privileged communities. Freedom must come from reconfiguring society in a way that’s inclusive and not reliant on the exploitation, suppression or ostracism of any societal cross-sections. Freedom has to be a consistent and sustainable goal—freedom for all, not just power for some.

Munroe Bergdorf is a London-based activist and model.

SOME OF THE MEN ARE VICTIMS. SOME OF THE MEN ARE HARM DOERS

BY **DARNELL L. MOORE**

I returned to my friend's house to let him know I'd made a decision to move on. What we'd shared had complicated our bond—especially the best parts we'd hidden and feared others would discover.

We were two men in our mid-20s who were not yet free. We were broken and often demonstrated our love by breaking each other with ease. I knew as much and had readied myself to leave the man who had been, at times, my best friend, my brother, my confidant, my colleague, my sex partner, my secret, my nightmare and my only desire.

I sat opposite him on the couch in his bedroom. I didn't sit on the bed, because positioning myself too close to him, in the very spot where we'd broken the rules that real men are taught to follow, would have signaled an invitation to return to where we once were.

His eyes were fixed on me. My eyes were locked onto my hands. His words were precise—there would be no ending to the friendship whose very beginning was complicated because of our secret. I knew I needed to leave, however.

And then he grabbed and pulled and held and pushed me down and resisted my resistance and took off my clothes. I pulled away and removed his hands and clenched my lips and resisted his insistence until I finally stopped and froze and lay there while he



broke the rule that real men are taught is okay to break.

Seven years we shared a friendship, and that is how it ended. It would take another seven years after that ending before I was able to put a name to what had transpired.

I wanted to be wrong. I wanted to believe that love was enough, that our long history of sexual intimacy was enough and that the realities of our complicated friendship were enough to reconsider that what had occurred was rape.

I did not want to believe I was a victim; I am a man. And before I was a man, I was a boy who was forced to have sex with an older female relative who tried to convince me that my body was not mine. And real men can't be victims because real men fight back.

No real man would allow his body to be pillaged. But I didn't fight back because I was in shock. I loved my friend. Real men take; they're never taken. I'd had sex many times throughout my life not realizing that fact.

Men are taught to ignore every "no" offered because our "yes" is the final word. And even now, as I reckon with the confusion left from that moment, I'm clear that I was taught the same lesson.

An intimate's "yes" is an invitation. Like so many men, I was not taught to be welcomed into another's space. I was not explicitly told that I needed permission to touch the body of another. I was not encouraged to take the time to ask about another's desire. But I know that if I'm to land on the other side of violence and in a place where my humanity is left intact, I have to refuse all the lies about manhood that I've been taught are true. I have to move beyond all I've learned and aim to be a better lover, a better intimate, a better human—for the sake of others and myself.

And I must not forget that intimacy, in its various forms, can be a safe horizon to which we men ascend if we aren't led to believe we're at our best when we leave behind the broken pieces of those with whom we engage. The consequence of our respect—of others' bodies, of others' needs, of others' spirits—is wholeness.

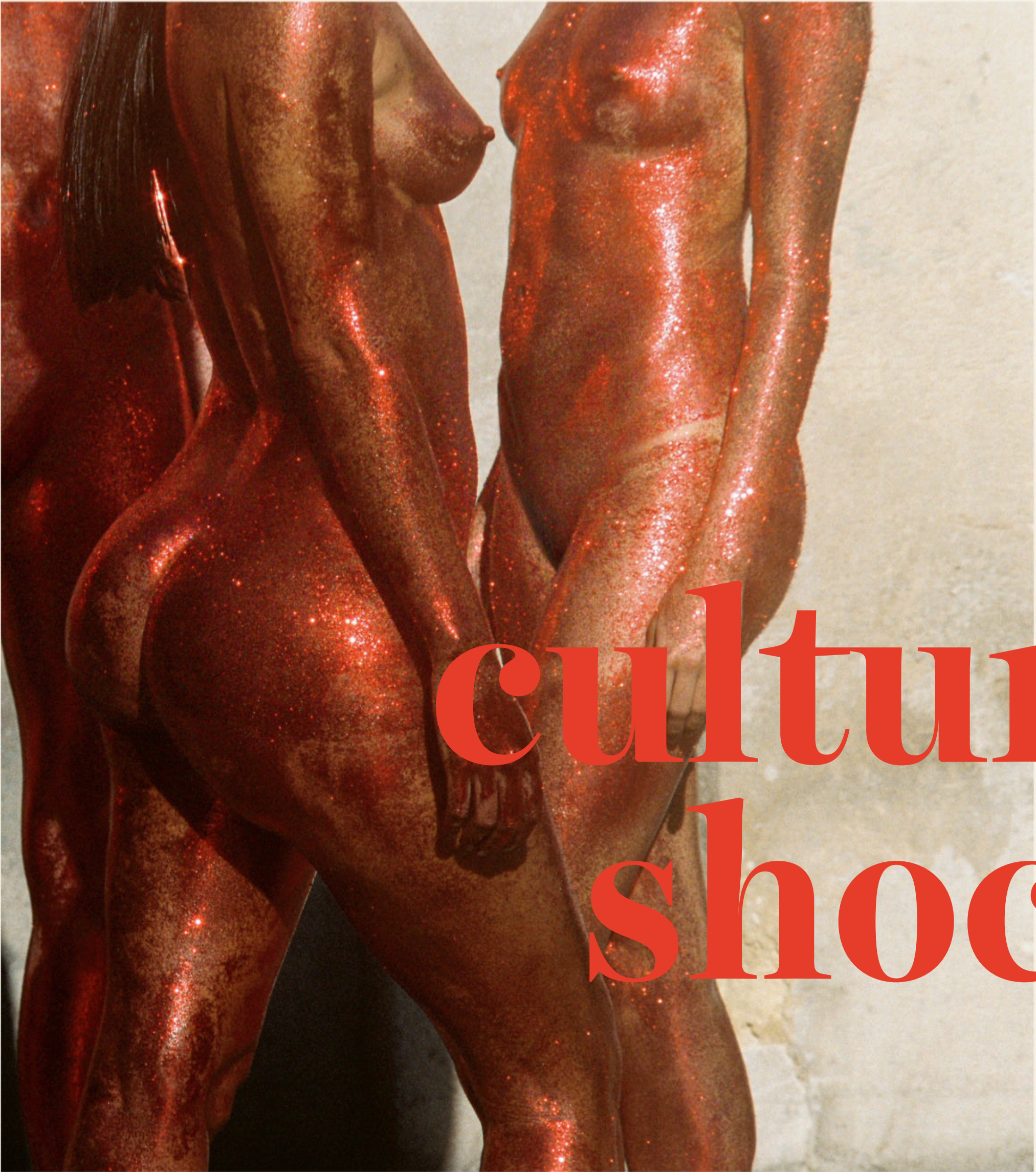


*Darnell L. Moore is head of U.S. strategy and programs at Breakthrough, a human rights organization, and author of **No Ashes in the Fire: Coming of Age Black & Free in America**.*

When PLAYBOY approached Carlota Guerrero about an original pictorial, the Spanish art director, who had gained international notoriety after shooting the indelible cover of Solange Knowles's 2016 album, *A Seat at the Table*, knew almost immediately what she wanted to accomplish: "I want to create an aesthetic inspired by the women who are empowered by their sexuality; I want to express that we are all goddesses and sexual beings at the same time."

Featuring more than a dozen women in various states of undress marching through Barcelona (and challenging the law; the city banned toplessness in 2011), the following work shows how sexuality—and sexual freedom—can be both performance art and public spectacle.





culture shock

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
CARLOTA GUERRERO

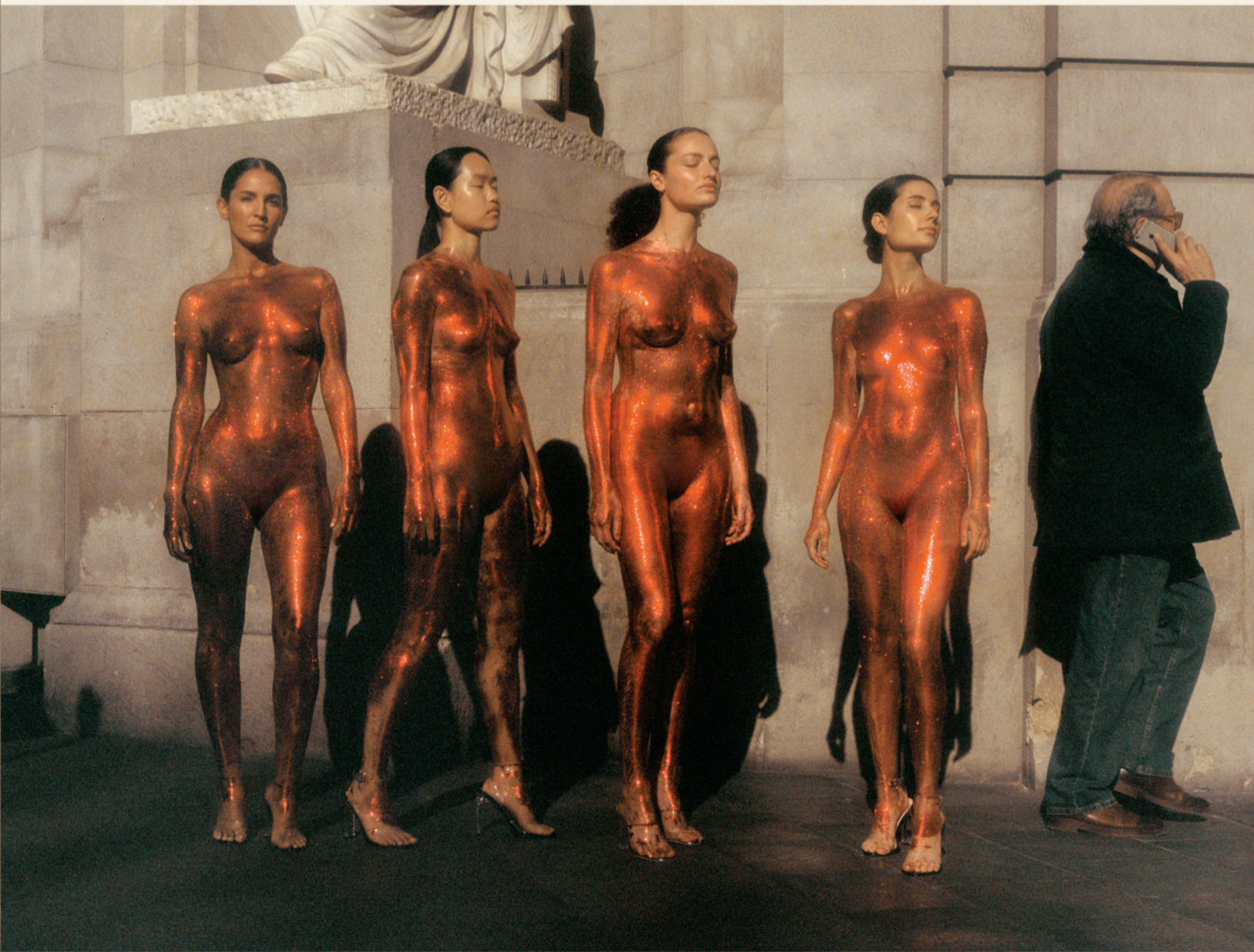
















P L A Y B O Y

THE RIT AG E

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA • KINUKO Y. CRAFT • THOMAS PAGE MCBEE
• A PRO-CHOICE PLATFORM • THE NAKED TRUTH: NUDE DUDES
IN *PLAYBOY* • REBEKKA ARMSTRONG • VINTAGE ADVISOR

A full-page photograph of a woman in a cowboy hat and star-patterned outfit performing on stage. She is wearing a wide-brimmed tan hat, a light blue crop top with star patterns, matching shorts, a wide white belt with star patterns, and tall brown cowboy boots. She is in a dynamic pose, looking upwards with her mouth open. The background is dark with stage lights visible at the bottom.

APOCALYPSE *THEN*

AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE MEMORABLE
PLAYMATE SCENE FROM FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA'S
OSCAR-WINNING 1979 CLASSIC

BY
STEVE PALOPOLI

On the great and sprawling road map of American culture, the distance between *PLAYBOY* magazine and Francis Ford Coppola's masterpiece *Apocalypse Now* is, surprisingly, just a short jaunt—perhaps one best traversed by helicopter.

Among the movie's many indelible scenes is a five-minute sequence, possibly inspired by actual events, in which Playmates put on a show for servicemen—or try to. Against the *chugga-chugga* thump of whirring blades, a Rabbit Head-emblazoned chopper descends from the night sky onto a brightly lit stage as hundreds of G.I.s scream in anticipation. An unfazed Captain Willard (Martin Sheen), leading his soldiers upriver to hunt the renegade Colonel Kurtz (Marlon Brando) when they unexpectedly encounter the USO show emceed by Bill Graham, joins the audience. As three Playmates—portrayed by Colleen Camp and real-life Centerfolds Cyndi Wood (1974 Playmate of the Year) and Linda Carpenter (August 1976, as Linda Beatty)—emerge from the helicopter and begin shimmying to “Suzie Q,” the crowd grows frenzied. Soon enough, the soldiers rush the platform, forcing the performers to depart. Like the movie as a whole, the scene brilliantly captures a frightening aspect of humanity: the menace of men driven to extremes.

"IT WAS ALL, I'M SURE, VERY DANGEROUS, BUT
THROUGHOUT THE SHOOTING WE DIDN'T LOSE
ONE PERSON. SO MANY THINGS CAN GO WRONG."



Previous page: In the film, February 1973 Playmate and PMOY 1974 Cyndi Wood takes on a role close to her heart—Playmate of the Year. She recalls that during her downtime on the set, and even in the midst of a typhoon, she liked to write original songs. **Above:** A scene featuring Colleen Camp that built on her real-life experience as a bird trainer was filmed but later cut from the original release; part of it can be seen in *Apocalypse Now Redux*. **Right:** Camp (top left), Linda Carpenter (top right) and Wood atop a helicopter bearing the Rabbit Head insignia.



In 1974, when Coppola started to consider directing *Apocalypse Now*, pretty much everyone around him thought it was a bad idea. As proven by Coppola's previous critical and box office successes—*The Godfather*, *The Godfather Part II* and *The Conversation*—gangsters, gritty realism and paranoia were the currency of New Hollywood. War movies were hopelessly uncool, especially ones about Vietnam, from which the U.S. had just withdrawn. But Coppola decided to take on the project and headed into the jungles of the Philippines—then under martial law and in the middle of a bloody civil conflict—where he turned a 1969 script by John Milius into a hallucinogenic antiwar epic. Despite legendary delays, when the film debuted in 1979 it won the Cannes Film Festival's highest honor and was nominated for eight Oscars, winning for cinematography and sound.

The movie has more than endured; it has evolved. In 2001 an expanded re-edit, *Apocalypse Now Redux*, restored 49 minutes to the film, including an additional Playmate story line involving helicopter fuel (as well as a brief connecting scene in which Willard's crew members talk about a U.S. soldier so obsessed with his PLAYBOYS that he kills a South Vietnamese officer who damages one). Kim Aubry, a producer on *Redux*, found inspiration in the original Playmate segment. "The USO scene was one of the realest moments I'd ever seen in cinema. There was something about it that felt almost like a documentary and yet surreal at the same time," he says. "It's so incredibly powerful and political."

Indeed, it's that kind of reaction that has contributed to the film's remarkable staying power. This year Coppola will release what he considers the definitive director's version, *Apocalypse Now: Final Cut*, which will of course include the iconic USO scene. To celebrate the 40th anniversary of the original release, we present the never-before-told oral history of how the Playmate scenes came to be, as related by those who were involved.

WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE

Unexpected disasters delayed but never derailed the ambitious production.

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA, director: I remember looking at the USO set with the head of the art department and saying, "I made a big mistake. As they approach from the river, they ought to see a glimpse of this place." We had built the set really far off the river, and you had to drive for a while. From a dramatic standpoint it would have been better if, when they're in the boat, they look and say, "What the hell is that?" He said, "Well, we put it in the wrong place." I said, "Yeah, but we'll make it work." And that's when we were hit by the typhoon that destroyed everything.

CYNDI WOOD, actress and 1974 PMOY: Every time they'd plan to do our scene, something would happen. On one trip, the day I arrived, Marty Sheen had a heart attack, so they shut down production for six weeks. Another time, I arrived just in time for what was probably the largest typhoon of the decade. All of a sudden, without warning, everybody's running, shouting "Take cover! Take cover!" and this typhoon comes raging through. We were trapped in an abandoned building in the jungle, far away from the set and the rest of the crew, with no way to communicate, no telephones. It was so loud. Here I am, 25 and pretty innocent, and all these grown men around me were scared to death that everybody was going to die.

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA: We had to stop shooting for three or four weeks. It was a major event; it destroyed the USO set, and we had to rebuild it. So I said, "Well, this time let's rebuild it

right on the river so that we can correct the mistake we made." And they did.

ROLE PLAYING

Some parts were filled by eager actors (with one photographer determined to document the production); others took time and effort to cast.

CYNDI WOOD: I didn't go looking for the part. I believe they called me in; I didn't have to audition. I was involved, believe it or not, for four years on that film—though I wasn't there all the time.

COLLEEN CAMP, actress: I had done a movie called *Smile*, which was filmed in the Bay Area and Santa Rosa. Fred Roos, co-producer of *Apocalypse Now*, came to visit that location in 1975, and I met him there. Fast-forward to when he was casting *Apocalypse Now*. I met with Fred, Francis and producer Gray Frederickson, and at first I did not want to do any nudity. But Cyndi Wood, who was Playmate of the Year, was a very close friend of mine.

NANCY MORAN, on-set photographer: I was a freelance photographer in Vietnam in the early 1970s. Gloria Emerson was a wonderful reporter for *The New York Times*, and I took pictures for many of her Vietnam stories. We worked together a lot. She was very critical of my going [to the *Apocalypse Now* set in the Philippines]; she thought it was too soon to make a movie like that, because it would take away from the war in a way. That kind of feeling was going around. I mean, it was very soon after the war ended.

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA: One of the Playmates we had cast before the place was wrecked by the storm was Lynda Carter—who, when we were able to start again three weeks later, couldn't come back because she had just been cast as Wonder Woman. So we cast Colleen Camp. We had Cyndi Wood, Colleen Camp and Linda Carpenter—all beautiful, very nice young women—and they worked with the choreographer to work out a little routine.

COLLEEN CAMP: One night I went to the Palm Restaurant on Santa Monica Boulevard with Fred Roos and Cyndi Wood. At that dinner, Fred and Cyndi convinced me I should replace Lynda Carter and rethink the nudity—which I did. So I got cast.

NANCY MORAN: Every day I called the publicity department at United Artists [the U.S. distributor for *Apocalypse Now*] and asked, "Do you want to hire me to go out there?" Finally they did. They wanted someone who'd actually been in Vietnam. I stayed in the Philippines for almost two months in 1976.

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA: We had to find many, many young men who could look like G.I.s, and we were of course in a place where there were few. We did a lot of work to locate army installations and educational institutions. That was a big and difficult effort. [For the role of the MC] I was fortunate to have a friend, Bill Graham—rest in peace—who was a famous rock promoter but always wanted to be an actor ever since he was a kid and first saw John Garfield in a movie. He was a remarkably wonderful person, Bill Graham.

COLLEEN CAMP: When I went to the Philippines in November 1976, it changed my life. I was 23 years old. It's martial law; there's 400 men and three women. The sequence that we filmed was unbelievable.

THE ALL-NIGHTER

The Playmate USO scene was shot in one single marathon night of filmmaking that included a variety of challenges.

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA: We knew that it was meant to be an incredible contradiction—which was not untrue—where the Americans had sort of brought their whole culture into this ancient, primeval jungle. So that was the fun of it, as it were. And of course

the challenge was that this unlikely show-business show should be deposited right there in the midst of antiquity. Obviously it was night, so the photographer had to figure out how the hell he would see it. He came up with this concept of these almost rafts with banks of lights on them, which were there to illuminate the scene.

COLLEEN CAMP: Our call time was about two in the afternoon, and we shot till about six in the morning. It was amazing. Here we are, in the middle of the Philippines. We had to be really careful because of the helicopter blades, and the pilots were 18, 19 years old—they were very young. I remember we had to get out of the helicopter onto that little tiny strip and just start dancing.

CYNDI WOOD: That little routine was nothing, but we shot for 16 hours straight and had to do it over and over again. They had to get different angles, and they shot the audience, and they did this and that. I collapsed on the stage from exhaustion. I've never been that tired in my life. They brought in a doctor, and he gave me a couple of B12 injections. That was kind of intense.

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA: Supplying the people, and their safety, food and bathroom facilities, was in itself a major operation. Once we had it all together, we just shot through the night. The reason it took so many hours to shoot was it involved difficult stunts—when the helicopter flies up and there are still guys hanging on to it and they drop into the water.

It was all, I'm sure, very dangerous, but throughout the shooting, we did not lose one person in the entire year and a half, two years. As a director working on a play or a movie, that's the greatest fear you have, because the people working so hard and so many hours have their minds on what they're doing and not on

their own safety. You're constantly emphasizing safety, and so many things can go wrong.

NANCY MORAN: It was a long night, and I remember thinking it was amazing that they could do all this at once. It was so much work, but it was a very funny scene—here's this boat going down-river, and all of a sudden they come across these Playmates. It's just a wonderful, surreal idea.

Colleen had a wonderful sense of humor on the set. Cyndi's the only one who could dance, but that adds to the goofy charm of the whole thing, I think. The guys were supposed to go nuts, which is absolutely believable, and start leaping onto the stage. But it's like—and this is one of the things about the movie—how much control do you have over hundreds of extras? If I had been Colleen or Cyndi or Linda, I think it would have been scary to have all these guys come jumping out.

COLLEEN CAMP: When the G.I.s started to rush the stage, it was actually scary. It was very quick—the girls get scared, they have to get back into the helicopter, and they're hurried off the stage. But it was actually planned out really well, so we weren't in any danger—except that, you know, helicopters are extremely dangerous.

CYNDI WOOD: When they rushed the stage, I don't remember being aware that that was going to happen. Francis did that a lot—you wouldn't know what was going to take place, so you would react naturally. He was an incredible director.

THE REAL VIETNAM PLAYMATE

Playboy lore has it that the USO scene was inspired by Playmate Jo Collins's much more practical 1966 trip to Vietnam.



GARY COLE, former PLAYBOY photography director, who oversaw the magazine's 1979 *Apocalypse Finally* pictorial: Back in those days, before a Playmate could appear in a film, Playboy had to approve the filmmaker or approve the script or something, because they didn't want the girls appearing in porno or really crap movies if it could be helped. Obviously, because Coppola was involved, I think we skipped that step.

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA: Everyone hassled us, from the Department of Defense on. Playboy could have easily said, "We do not want you to depict the Playboy logo on that helicopter." They could have done anything they wanted; it was their imagery. But they basically left us alone, and I was always very appreciative.

ELIZABETH NORRIS, former PLAYBOY senior director of public relations: In the 1960s, a lifetime PLAYBOY subscription was deliverable by a Playmate. During the Vietnam war, a group of guys in the 173rd Airborne Brigade pooled their money, and one of them, Jack Price, ordered a lifetime subscription. They wanted a Playmate to deliver it, which was part of the deal. Long story short, 1965 Playmate of the Year Jo Collins went to the hospital in Vietnam where these men were and met them.

JO COLLINS, December 1964 Playmate and 1965 PMOY: I didn't even know where Vietnam was—I thought I was going to Europe. I had no clue. Never in a million years did I think it was going to turn out the way it did.

GARY COLE: People would say, "Oh, Playboy sent Playmates over there." Well, Jo Collins is the Playmate we sent to Vietnam who actually visited with the troops. No girls ever went over there and jumped out of a helicopter and did a go-go dance or anything like that.

JO COLLINS: When I was in Vietnam in 1966, we were in areas that were literally being bombed. We could have been blown up at any time. Scary, exciting—it was all those things. I visited as many bases and medical field centers as they allowed. I wish I could have worn attractive outfits, like the miniskirts and go-go boots [the Playmates wear in the movie].

ELIZABETH NORRIS: We have always thought Jo's Vietnam trip was the basis for that scene. However, that has never been substantiated.

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA: The original script, and that scene, were the work of John Milius—he's the one who was really the genius behind *Apocalypse Now*, in my opinion. I know he was well aware that there were Playboy Playmates in Vietnam. I did not know of it. I didn't base it on that; I based it on what was in the original script, which might have been inspired by that.

Far left: Director Francis Ford Coppola speaks with Camp behind the scenes, with Wood in the background. **Left:** Wood says that as the helicopter stunt was being filmed, she wasn't sure whether the G.I.s hanging from the landing skid were stuntmen or not: "Some of those things you just didn't know, because they were so spontaneous." **Top right:** As the challenging production went on, Coppola saw the movie's budget balloon from \$12 million to nearly three times that. **Bottom right:** Carpenter and Coppola on set.





Linda Carpenter, the real-life August 1976 Playmate, plays a fictional Miss August in *Apocalypse Now*. To fill the crowd with hundreds of G.I. look-alikes, the crew sought out extras at military and educational institutions in the Philippines.

LOST AND FOUND LEGACIES

Across the film's several iterations, the core Playmate scene has remained intact.

COLLEEN CAMP: In the John Milius script there was a scene that set up the girls losing the helicopter fuel with Bill Graham, and then they trade for fuel to get out. Those scenes were crucial to the subsequent scene. But the day I arrived in March 1977, Martin Sheen had a heart attack, so the scenes we were shooting never had a setup. Francis Coppola, in improvisational mode, said, "Tell me a little bit about yourself," and I said, "Well, I used to be a bird trainer at Busch Gardens." He decided to write a whole scene of me and birds in the helicopter, and a piece of it was shown in *Apocalypse Now Redux*.

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA: During the first typhoon, I didn't want to stop shooting, because I have always felt that if you get bad weather, that's an opportunity to have something really extraordinary. You might as well shoot. So we all went during the typhoon, and the crew tried to put the set back together. The rain was coming down unbelievably. That's when we shot the scene where they go to the medevac camp, which was in the typhoon. And that was put back in the *Redux* version.

KIM AUBRY, *Redux* co-producer: Obviously those [fuel-related] scenes were intended to be in the film. The 1979 released version has some strange gaps where, for length and other reasons, scenes were removed, and there are certain continuity things that you don't quite get unless you see these added scenes.

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA: Since I had these three women, and they were all uniquely talented and had their own stories, I shot three additional sequences in this scene—which would now be extremely bad in the #MeToo movement—where Bill Graham sort of trades the girl for fuel. This is not something

that would go over very well in today's political climate. The point I was trying to make was that in a way the abuse of sending a 17-year-old boy to Vietnam to drop napalm on people is as immoral as what is done to these young, beautiful girls at 17. That was a symbol of abuse—what we do to the young men, we also do to the young girls in our so-called civilization.

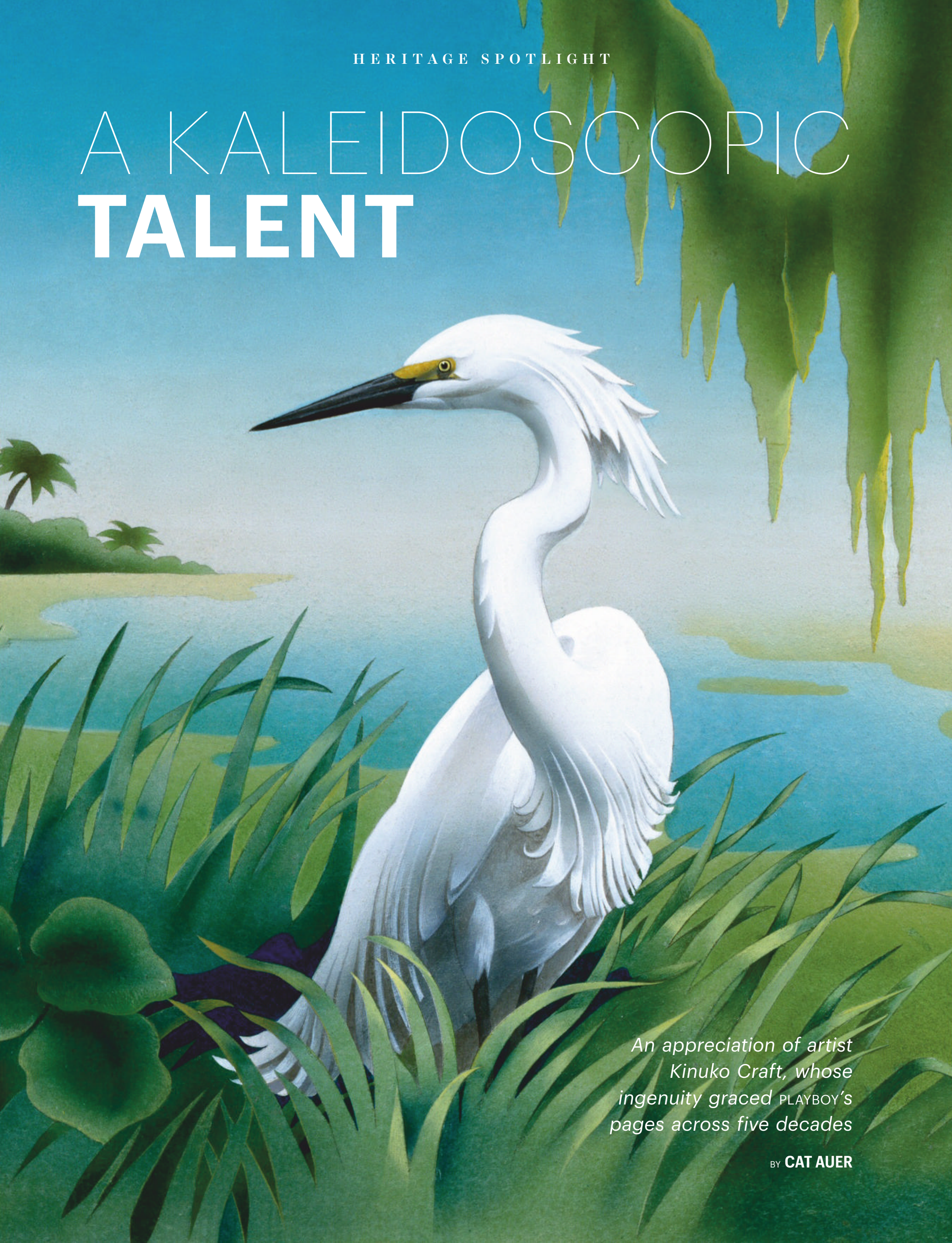
COLLEEN CAMP: When the movie came out, initially I was upset. All my scenes were cut because we weren't able to shoot a scene to set them up. At the end of the day, it was a lesson. You can't control things. It was a very important thing to learn, and I was lucky to learn it at that age.

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA: Tribeca is going to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the movie, and they said to me, "Which version do you want to show, the original 1979 version or the much longer *Redux* version?" The 1979 version was very abruptly cut to be short, because at the time the movie came out, no one knew what its fate was going to be. A lot of people said it was too long and too weird. I didn't really like the original version, but I also felt the *Redux* version was too long. So I said, "What I'd really like to do now is what I think is the best version—what I would say is Francis's version, the one I prefer." And that ultimately got done, and I am very pleased with it. What's available in 2019 for color and sound is so beyond what it was when we first made the movie that it looks and sounds unbelievable. *Apocalypse Now: Final Cut* has the Playmate show, of course, but it does not have the medevac scene.

CYNDI WOOD: Working on the film was truly an incredible experience, scary as it was. We were in a solid concrete building with no glass in the windows when the biggest typhoon hit. It was so loud, it was deafening, like at any moment the whole building would cave in. This is going to sound weird, but I've never felt more alive in my whole life. ■

HERITAGE SPOTLIGHT

A KALEIDOSCOPIC TALENT



*An appreciation of artist
Kinuko Craft, whose
ingenuity graced PLAYBOY's
pages across five decades*

BY CAT AUER

One day in 1974, Kinuko Yamabe Craft hand-delivered to **Playboy's** Chicago office a set of paintings she'd been commissioned to create for the magazine. Designed to accompany a "ribald classic," Craft's elaborate wood-panel triptych (right) and two additional works were so skillfully done, from the intricate medieval Russian iconography to the faux-distressed gold-leaf frames, that they looked as if they'd been lifted from the walls of a museum.

Stunned, associate art director Kerig Pope dropped to his knees and kissed her feet.

"I was astounded by how well she did it," says Pope. "It had a very authentic look, and I was terribly impressed. It's kind of embarrassing for me; she probably thought, What kind of weirdo is this?"

Craft was unfazed by Pope's enthusiasm. Still a working artist today at the age of 79, she says that her many **PLAYBOY** projects gave her the opportunity to learn about other artists and their techniques. "PLAYBOY worked like a school for me," she says. "It was the most effective training I ever got."

Having begun in 1967 with an assignment from founding art director Arthur Paul, Craft continued to work for **PLAYBOY** through 2000. Across those five decades, her phenomenal gift for working in whatever medium and style the task at hand required—including art deco, biblical, trompe l'oeil, even nursery-rhyme illustration—is on display in more than 100 magazine pieces.

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From the moment she picked up her big sister's crayons and drew a mountain landscape on a sliding screen in her family home in Kanazawa, Japan at the age of two, Craft knew she was an artist. "That was the first huge painting I did," she says. "Nobody scolded me—I'm so grateful!"

Another early moment had an indelible effect on the nascent artist. "My grandmother was carrying me on her back. Outside was the forest, in beautiful sunlight. A stray bamboo leaf, stuck to the end of a cobweb, twirling with the breeze. The sunlight hit the wooden sash, and I thought it was the most beautiful thing," she says. "It is etched in my mind. That was the first full awareness of being surrounded by beauty."

Ever since, Craft has gravitated toward beauty and endeavored to capture it in her work. "Unfortunately, I'm a mere mortal," she says, "and so I can't grab it."

After obtaining a fine art degree in Japan, Craft moved to the States in late 1964 for graduate study at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Arriving in the thick of a miserable winter, she almost turned on her heel and fled. "No leaves on the trees, and it was desolate, so lonely looking," she recalls. "And the cold! It was colder than any cold I knew."

But she stuck it out and began her studies in 1965, frequently visiting the eponymous museum next door to wonder at the masterworks within. After a year and a half, Craft left school and started working within Chicago's studio system, which she describes as "a bunch of illustrators sitting and waiting for salesmen to bring jobs." It wasn't long before her portfolio found its



way to Art Paul and she accepted her first **PLAYBOY** assignment: an illustration for a wry short story about urban bohemians. From there the **PLAYBOY** commissions kept coming in, engaging her virtuoso artistry for everything from fiction, humor, essays and tech stories to a sex survey.

"With her sophisticated citation of many strands from Western art's tradition of visual fantasy, Craft clearly has high expectations for her audience's wider cultural knowledge," writes professor Lorraine Janzen Kooistra about Craft's **PLAYBOY** paintings for another ribald classic: Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*. Hieronymus Bosch, Botticelli and Arthur Rackham are among the visual references Kooistra notes in the playfully wicked paintings.

Craft's versatility also caught the eye of novelist and cultural critic Ray Bradbury. "Kinuko Craft is an artist for all seasons, for all kinds of subjects, and in all kinds of styles," he writes in his 1985 volume *The Art of Playboy*. "She fits herself to her subject with charming ease and yet leaves herself free to remain herself. Her illustrations suggest one who is a true connoisseur of art, widely ranging through all the countries of the world."

Bradbury goes on: "One cannot help but think how delightful it would be to walk into a gallery full of the fruits of her kaleidoscopic talents." (We're happy to report that one can, simply by flipping through the **PLAYBOY** archive.) Years later, Craft would illustrate *The Witch Door*, one of Bradbury's original **PLAYBOY** short stories.

Other notable authors whose stories were paired with Craft's creations include Paul Theroux, John Collier and T.C. Boyle. Alice K. Turner, **PLAYBOY's** fiction editor from 1980 to 2001, described her as "one of our very best artists."

Writer Gore Vidal was so taken with one of Craft's paintings for his 1978 story *Kalki* that she and the magazine decided to give it to him. But in trying to compliment her work, Vidal unintentionally slighted her. "When he received it, he said, 'I usually don't like illustration, but I like this one.' It's offensive," Craft says, laughing. "I wanted to say, 'What's wrong with illustration?'"

Outside of **PLAYBOY**, Craft worked for advertising agencies, textbook publishers and other magazines including *Time*, *Newsweek*, *National Geographic*, *The Atlantic* and *Forbes*. Rarely given much time to complete her projects and reluctant to turn down work, Craft frequently pulled all-nighters to meet deadlines, drinking a single cup of cold green tea to stay awake.

"YOU CAN FEEL THE PAINTER'S PASSION IMPRISONED IN THE CANVAS."

"Everything that was flying my way, I caught it. It was one of those aggressive periods. I have to do it, I want to do it," she says. "That was the passion I had—even for math-book illustrations."

In the first decades of her career, illustration was a male-dominated field, as Pope recalls. Craft faced additional barriers, especially at smaller agencies and publications. "When they looked at me, all they saw was Asian. 'Bring me the Asian samples from your portfolio next time,'" Craft says potential clients would tell her. "Not being born in this country, and speaking with an accent, was not advantageous."

But Craft recalls *PLAYBOY* as being fair and welcoming. "They looked at me as a painter, just a painter," she says. "PLAYBOY was gender blind, color blind."

Craft's work has been shown in galleries across the country, and she was inducted into the Society of Illustrators hall of

fame in 2008. Her paintings have graced the covers and pages of dozens of books, and her work is in the permanent collection of the Smithsonian.

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In the early 1980s Craft left Chicago for the East Coast to settle into more rural environs. "I love trees more than humans, I think," she says. High on a hill in the forests of Connecticut, a black bear visits her big backyard and plays with the birdseed cakes, sometimes bringing its cubs. It's a setting Craft vastly prefers to city life, though living in a rural area has had its complications; she recalls sending canvases on their own to New York via bus.

Though the advent of faxing and later FedEx made it much easier to deliver sketches and final art to clients, not all technological advances have resonated with Craft. Digital art in particular holds no allure. "At a museum, you can feel the painter's passion imprisoned in the canvas," she says. "When it's printed, everything—structure, composition, idea—is there, but not the passion. Digital gives me the same feeling. It's beautiful, but somehow not enough."

The artwork Craft produced for *PLAYBOY* spanned multiple genres, but today she paints mostly in a style of fantastical realism. Her newer work frequently features strong women characters such as Eleanor of Aquitaine, the 12th century queen.

"I'm becoming a militant for women's rights," Craft says. "Y chromosome is not that great!"

These days she sells her original canvases through the Borsini-Burr Gallery in California. She's hard at work on an oil painting of a "winter general" who marched from the depths of her imagination—a powerful white-haired woman wearing armor and wielding a sword. For such works the initial drawing can take up to a week, followed by session after session of painting with her brushes, which she likens to feeding: "If the painting takes longer, I have to feed her again. It's very hard. I'm 79 years old and work like I'm 49!"

Taxing though it may be, Craft has no plans to stop painting, finding purpose in endlessly chasing a connection to beauty and to nature. "There's something I want to grasp, which always eludes me. I think I'm going to feel that till the end of my life," Craft says. "My poor bones can't rest. I have to do what I'm wired to do." ■



Page 213: Detail of Craft's illustration for a June 1987 *PLAYBOY* fiction piece titled *The Egret*. **Opposite:** The triptych Craft created to accompany *The Gabrieliad*, Alexander Pushkin's naughty New Testament spoof that *PLAYBOY* ran as a "ribald classic" in 1974. It was her first time working with gold leaf; she visited the medieval room at Chicago's Art Institute for inspiration. **Left:** Craft in her studio, circa 1983.





THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

FIGHTING TO BE SEEN CAN MEAN CONTENDING WITH BEING MISHEARD. FORTY YEARS AFTER AN UNPRECEDENTED *PLAYBOY* INTERVIEW, **THOMAS PAGE MCBEE** EXAMINES DESTRUCTIVE TRANS NARRATIVES AND FLAWED FRAMEWORKS

In 1979, famed composer Wendy Carlos came out as trans in the pages of this magazine. This was no small thing. By the time she sat down with journalist Arthur Bell for the *Playboy Interview*, Carlos had won three Grammy Awards for her 1968 synthesized take on Bach and scored Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*. *PLAYBOY*'s nearly 14,000-word piece—billed as “a candid conversation with the *Switched-On Bach* composer who, for the first time, reveals her sex-change operation and her secret life as a woman”—elicited sympathetic letters from readers and was arguably groundbreaking.

It was, after all, one of the few pieces of original journalism about trans people in the mainstream media in the late 1970s. Yet a rereading reveals troubling ways in which gatekeepers, ostensibly charged with faithfully presenting our emergent stories, failed. It is also a reminder that the human cost of that failure, all these decades later, is part of every trans person's story, including my own.

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If Americans had heard of a trans person at all at the time of the Carlos interview, it was probably Renée Richards, who in 1976 and 1977 had fought to continue playing tennis after her transition, generating a major controversy in women's sports. For refusing to abandon her desire to play professionally, Richards was called an “extraordinary spectacle” in *Sports Illustrated*, shortly before a 1977 New York Supreme Court ruling confirmed her right to compete “as female.”

Erasure—ignoring or dismissing trans people and their contributions—is why most people today, when they think of the pivotal 1969 Stonewall riots, don't remember the many trans women of color who were on the front lines. Erasure was the primary weapon used against trans people 40 years ago, and when it didn't work, dehumanization became the norm. Despite existing across cultures and millennia, trans people, the new cultural narrative went, threatened the “natural” order of things. Two years after the Richards ruling, Carlos, who'd made the occasional public appearance as “Walter” despite having completed her medical transition in 1972, was understandably wary about making her trans status public in a landscape that was hostile and othering—that is, dehumanizing through marginalization—in its treatment of trans women. (Trans men

then, as now, didn't much figure into the cultural imagination.)

The misguided idea that physical differences are manifestations of something sinister was, it seemed, back in vogue. Such superstitions, dominant in the medieval era, had largely been put to bed once Freud came along and demonstrated that it was the mind, not the body, that held the key to a person's behavior. But journalists, film directors and authors, newly eager to tell trans stories and unconcerned with the well-being of their subjects, found an enduring language in monstrosity. Bell, in fact, sums up Carlos's story with an allusion to the classic monster tale *The Phantom of the Opera*. “[She] became a phantom figure, living in [her] own version of the opera house,” the introduction to the interview announces—right after comparing her personal life to “a drama that could easily have been written into *Clockwork*'s surrealistic scenario.” Bell casts Carlos as not-human, a monster occupying a nightmarish world of her own making, rather than laying the blame for that nightmare squarely at the feet of the culture that had shamed Carlos into hiding in the first place. His framework demonstrates this violent “othering” in action.

But there's a lot to learn from Carlos's graceful and humane responses to the often anthropological and ill-informed questions. (At one point, Bell asks her to describe her bottom surgery in gnarly medical detail. She does so reluctantly and “utterly without emotion”—a reasonable response to the likely humiliating task of describing the most intimate part of her body not only to a stranger but to a huge, unknown audience of readers.) All these years later, it's painful to read her insistence on herself in the empathy vortex of the interview. In a direct dig that Bell seems not to notice, she says, “Being a transsexual makes me a barometer of other people's own comfort with themselves. Those who aren't sexually at peace with themselves tend to be the most uptight around me.” At one point, he asks if she had “any idea” what would have happened if she'd not transitioned. “Yes,” she responds, with a frustration I'd wager almost any trans person can relate to, “I'd be dead.”

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It's a funny thing to trace one's own winding story with this cultural rubble, this debris from the wrecking ball of history, in mind. Despite the recent ground gained in representation, mainstream American culture has generally reacted to trans

bodies in a way that has been disastrous for those of us who live in them: We face some of the highest murder and suicide rates of any population in America.

As a trans author and journalist, I've spent the past decade or so holding my nose and digging into our history in an attempt to understand where I learned there was something wrong with being who I am. That shame, which took me years to overcome, delayed my transition into adulthood and nearly killed me. And without fail, I've located it in the framing of our stories—the othering that is the hallmark of the many movies, articles and books that defined the trans experience with little to no input

the dark heart of humanity, even if I refuse to make anyone a monster: Despite the courageous visibility of Carlos, Richards and many other trans women and men who made the decision to live with heroic openness at the end of the 20th century, the people tasked with telling their stories often failed at their jobs. In some cases, they're still failing.

The good news is that the rise in digital and social media has vastly expanded opportunities for trans people to tell our own stories and to change the conversation—away from limiting and dehumanizing scripts about genitals and surgeries and toward bigger and broader questions: What is gender anyway? How



Composer and electronic-music pioneer Wendy Carlos in her New York City studio, October 1979. In addition to recording the Grammy-winning album *Switched-On Bach*, the first all-synthesizer classical music release, Carlos composed the scores for movies including *A Clockwork Orange*, *The Shining* and *Tron*. Her May 1979 *Playboy* Interview is available to read on our digital archive, iPlayboy.com.

from actual trans people. It may be hard to remember in the era of *Pose* and *Orange Is the New Black*, but until recently, when we showed up in the American imagination we were either tragic victims (*Boys Don't Cry*), villainous shape-shifters (*The Crying Game*) or straight-up villains (*The Silence of the Lambs*).

As for Carlos, I wasn't able to speak with her for this story. A representative directed me to her website, which gives "PLAYBOY magazine editors" a negative rating on her short list of "people and publications who have betrayed a cruel indifference to anyone's interests but their own."

I know what it's like to risk this cruelty for the small but sacred reward of continuing to live another day. And I see a truth about

does it define how we see the world and how the world sees us? What is a "real" man or woman, and who taught us to think of ourselves that way? How does race complicate gender identity? What about class?

These are questions for every body—and I believe that our shared humanity makes gender a rich framework in which to explore culture, trans or not. The shame of journalism past is rooted, almost always, in the inability of reporters to see their own biases. Given that, journalists who speak to trans subjects may want to look in the mirror first for some personal reflection. For my part, it took 30 years before I saw myself in my reflection.

Can you imagine? ■

A GALA FOR THE AGES



WELCOME TO OUR 65TH ANNIVERSARY PARTY

The luminaries attending this imaginary scene all touched, each in their own indelible way, Playboy and its evolution—from penning the first *Playboy Interview* to being the magazine's most famous cover model to helping the company for 20 years. Can you name these cultural heavyweights and American icons? (For answers, see page 225.) To this coterie of early influencers, we raise a special toast of thanks. Here's to them—and to another 65 years.

ILLUSTRATION BY **SPIROS HALARIS**

WE WON'T GO BACK

FOR MORE THAN HALF A CENTURY, PLAYBOY HAS CHAMPIONED REPRODUCTIVE
AUTONOMY—IN THESE PAGES, IN THE COURTS AND ON THE STREETS

BY **ELIZABETH YUKO**

“It’s okay if you think it’s not right for women to have abortions—but it’s not your problem, because we decide.” So said Chelsea Handler in a piece *PLAYBOY* ran during the white-knuckle summer of 2016. Entitled *My Choice*, Handler’s story includes characteristically blunt reflections on her personal experience with abortion and makes a case for the durability of *Roe v. Wade*. “Once you go forward in history,” she wrote, “you don’t go backward.”

But backward may be exactly the direction reproductive rights in the United States are now headed. With the emergence of at least 14 state-level abortion cases that could, if they find their way to the newly right-leaning Supreme Court, result in the toppling of *Roe v. Wade*, it’s time for the pro-choice movement to regroup. Toward that end, we offer this brief history of reproductive rights through the lens of *PLAYBOY*.

...

America in the 1960s was, by and large, not a safe place for a woman to terminate a pregnancy. In most states, abortion was illegal (with exceptions for cases such as fetal anomaly, extreme natal complication and some instances of rape and incest). Those seeking the procedure had to resort to whatever care they could get, which ranged from sympathetic doctors operating illegally to unqualified individuals performing abortions without training, sterile conditions or necessary resources. In 1965, 17 percent

of all deaths related to pregnancy and childbirth occurred due to illegal abortions, according to the National Center for Health Statistics. Abortion was a public health crisis, and *PLAYBOY* responded accordingly.

Some of the subject’s earliest appearances in the magazine were in Hugh Hefner’s *Playboy Philosophy*, peppered throughout his voluminous musings on sex and society. In a January 1964 installment Hefner wrote, “Abortion remains illegal in all states of the Union, although it is undergone by hundreds of thousands of women annually, under circumstances that seriously endanger not only their health and welfare, but their very lives.” To combat any misconceptions about who was seeking the procedure, he added that more than half of all illegal abortions were performed on married women. Like it or not, he argued, abortion was a mainstay in married, middle-class American families.

PLAYBOY cemented its position in the December 1965 issue, in a response to an anti-choice letter: “A pregnant woman is faced with choices—and we think she should be allowed to decide which alternative is preferable under the circumstances—whatever the circumstances happen to be.” We upped the ante in the May 1967 issue when, speaking in the *Playboy Forum*—a deep-diving letters section in which readers and editors debated issues raised in the *Philosophy*—our editors urged readers to write to their senators and representatives, demanding they support bills to

“liberalize antiquated abortion statutes” in 12 states. Clearly Hef and his colleagues viewed the issue as one of universal urgency.

Perhaps the most meaningful contributions to the conversation came from women, despite the magazine’s overwhelmingly male readership at the time. According to a 2017 article by Sierra Tishgart in *The Cut*, of the more than 350 letters on abortion published in the magazine between 1963 and 1973, approximately one third were written by women. In a world where decisions about women’s bodies were made overwhelmingly by men, women used our letters section as a global platform from which to speak their truths.

In addition to our editorial coverage, the Playboy Foundation—the charitable-giving organization that supported groups embodying the *Playboy Philosophy*—began funding the abortion-rights movement in 1966 by providing a grant to the Association for the Study of Abortion, which offered information and strategy advice for other advocacy groups. This continued with financial support of organizations including the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws and the Women’s National Abortion Coalition, as well as those working on a local level in middle-American battlegrounds such as North Dakota, Michigan and Ohio. Playboy also provided funding to the American Civil Liberties Union Women’s Rights Project, whose co-founder Ruth Bader Ginsburg co-authored a 1973 letter to the magazine that cited “the Playboy Foundation’s generous support” while emphasizing the daunting challenges that remained.

As the idealistic 1960s gave way to the shell-shocked 1970s, the pro-choice movement dug in: Instead of pushing for liberalized abortion laws, it began advocating for their all-out repeal. This was initially addressed here in a 1967 *Forum* letter from Dr. Lonny Myers of Illinois Citizens for the Medical Control of Abortion. Myers argued that even in the wake of partial reform, “there will be no significant improvement in all the tragedies associated with clandestine abortions.” But perhaps the most well-known example of PLAYBOY’s advocacy for repealing abortion laws came in the form of *The Abortion Revolution*, a September 1970 article by Dr. Robert Hall that served as an examination of the history of the procedure and a playbook for how a total repeal could be achieved. His predictions of how the repeal would carry the day in the Supreme Court largely came true.

Which brings us to the case that changed it all.

...

In July 1970, a 22-year-old Floridian named Shirley Wheeler became the first woman in American history to be convicted of manslaughter for having an abortion. The Playboy Foundation provided grants to the Center for Constitutional Rights to help with Wheeler’s defense, as well as to law professor Cyril Means, who filed a brief on her behalf on constitutional issues involved in the case. Ultimately, the Florida Supreme Court overturned her conviction. And an important bond was formed: The foundation later provided Means with the funds to file an amicus curiae brief in support of the Texas court case that eventually led to *Roe v. Wade*.

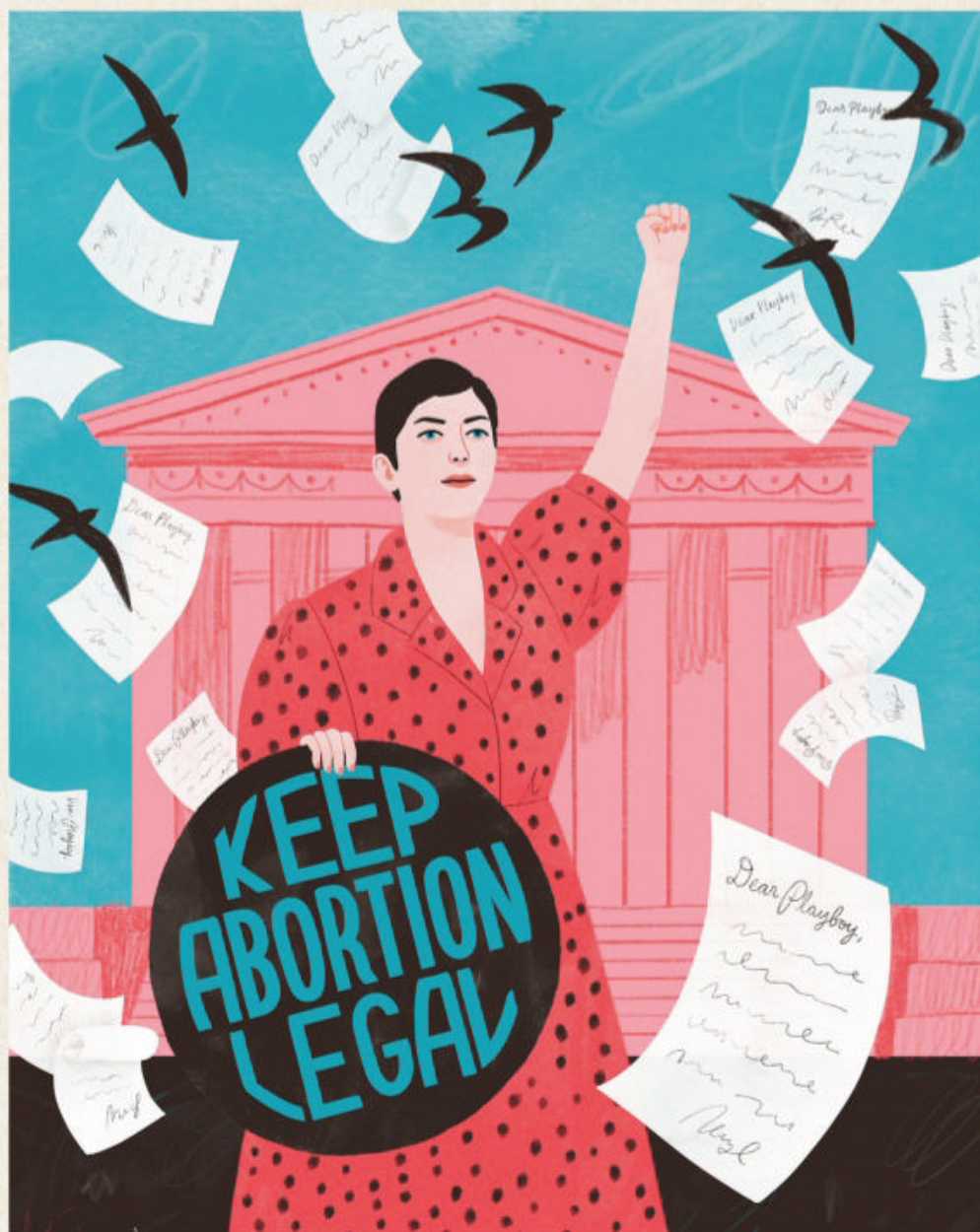
The right to privacy was the basis for this landmark case. The

plaintiff, then known only as Jane Roe, was a single woman from Texas who wanted to end her pregnancy in one of the many states that permitted abortion only when the woman’s life was in danger. In a 7-2 decision, handed down in January 1973, the Supreme Court ruled that the constitutional right to privacy “is broad enough to encompass a woman’s decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy.” Most of the existing state laws on abortion were rendered unconstitutional.

With that victory, PLAYBOY’s abortion coverage ebbed over the next three decades—with the notable exception of in-depth coverage of anti-abortion terrorism in the 1990s. But a creeping post-Obama conservatism, plus increasing challenges to abortion on state and federal levels, meant a new wave of

engagement. Handler’s 2016 piece broke the news that the author had chosen to have not one but two abortions at the age of 16—a revelation that went viral and demonstrated the issue’s continuing volatility. Two years later, on the other side of Donald Trump’s ascension to the White House, then outgoing president of Planned Parenthood Cecile Richards sat for the *Playboy Interview*. The tenor of that May/June 2018 installment echoed that of our coverage from the 1960s and early 1970s. Richards stressed the need for everyone, men included, to stay vigilant in the fight for reproductive rights—a battle cry that became even more urgent with the confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court in the fall of last year.

“If we believe in progress and in taking away barriers,” Richards said, “there’s always going to be a next fight.” ■





MEMBERS ONLY

A LOOK AT THE VERY SMALL (BUT SOMETIMES FAIRLY LARGE) CLUB OF MEN
WHO HAVE APPEARED NUDE OR NEAR NUDE IN *PLAYBOY*'S PAGES



BY LANE MOORE

P

PLAYBOY is world famous for its nudes. So closely associated is the publication with sexy depictions of women that I was shocked to discover the magazine has, across its more than 65 years, run plenty of photos of naked or near-naked men.

Nude dudes, in PLAYBOY? Now that's worth a little exploration.

So I decided to investigate. Whipping out my proverbial magnifying glass, I would become a privates detective, a gumshoe of guys, a dick of...dick. What would the pages reveal?

• • •

As I sifted through the nearly 750 issues that constitute the PLAYBOY archive, a couple of things became abundantly clear. First, the images of unclothed women far outnumber those of nude or semi-nude men, which isn't terribly shocking. But it is worth noting, because my impression had been that PLAYBOY was designed to show women without any men at all—no distractions that might get in the way of the ultimate fantasy. And second, though scantily clad men do show up in PLAYBOY's pages, the true full monty is rare, and a full-on hard-on appears to be a unicorn—that is, it doesn't exist. (I would love to be wrong about this.)

I was excited by my first sighting of a nearly naked guy—not because it's an especially sexy photo (it's not) but because it occurs in the December 1953 PLAYBOY—the very first issue. On the back inside cover, a black-and-white photo shows a young man wearing nothing but a turban, a codpiece and a saucy smile. The image promotes an article in the next issue about a swinging “art ball,” and that January 1954 piece features front and back photos of another nearly nude man, this one dressed as a satyr—horns, cleverly placed ivy leaves and a perky tail secured by God knows what. Fun party!

On the hunt for naked men in PLAYBOY, things seemed off to a cheeky and playful

start. But alas, the fun, sassy “oops, my towel might fall” photos quickly dry up, with nary a pec to be seen for what feels like years.

Thankfully, once the 1960s and 1970s hit, we get back to intermittent pictorials spotlighting guys who, in keeping with the free-spirited times, take off those confining clothes, man. These photo features often revolve around well-known actors in on-set photography from upcoming movies. Notable members of this elite gentlemen's club include Peter Sellers (carrying a guitar to protect his modesty in the nudist-camp whodunit *A Shot in the Dark*), Elliott Gould (manhood obscured in a sudsy bathtub for his film *Move*) and David Carradine (steaming up the rails with Barbara Hershey in *Boxcar Bertha*).

Though I'm sure these sets were professional and chaste, some of the 1970s pictorials remind me of screen-grabbed porn. Looking at you, Kris Kristofferson and Sarah Miles, whose “oh my” July 1976 photo spread (promoting the movie *The Sailor Who Fell From Grace With the Sea*) showcases no fewer than five different sex moves.

Frankly, it's nice to see a man like Kristofferson doing his part for readers' entertainment, even if we don't get to see his junk. The more I thought about it, the more sense this sort of male nudity seemed to make in PLAYBOY. The magazine began as a kind of instruction manual for straight American men, so what better way to illustrate the epitome of that lifestyle than by putting naked men with naked women in sexy situations? It's like an easy-to-follow visual aid to living the dream—five sex moves you too can master!—but without any visible wangs to distract men from their affirmed heterosexuality.

And then, in the August 1973 issue, I hit the jackpot: what I believe to be the magazine's first full-on penis photo—a shot of porn star Harry Reems in a...*relaxed* state.



Page 222: In *The Vatican Sex Manual*, Eric Idle and a model demonstrate (clockwise from top left) “The Fred Astaire,” “The Papal Bull,” “The Trade-Union Congress” and “Ninety-Six”—just a few of the “many thousands of positions in which sex cannot be enjoyed.” **Above:** Outtakes from the December 1971 pictorial *Personal Visions of the Erotic* reveal a fully nude man and woman; in the photo selected for publication, the woman is pictured solo.

It’s a seminal moment for *PLAYBOY*. Even better, the magazine didn’t just publish that groundbreaking photo and then decide it had filled the penis quota for the year: The following issue includes an equally revealing photo of actor Johnny Crawford promoting his appropriately titled flick *The Naked Ape* (which happens to be a Playboy Productions movie).

That this tiny uptick in male nudity comes in the early 1970s is no surprise; porn was pumping into the mainstream, and the so-called pubic wars, in which *PLAYBOY* and *Penthouse* published raunchier and raunchier images, were raging. By the 1980s, it seems a kinder, gentler era of male nudity had dawned in *PLAYBOY*, as opposed to the frequently intense sexuality of the 1970s. Dolph Lundgren is like a pale beefy mannequin, more prop than player in his 1985 pictorial with then girlfriend supermodel Grace Jones. In 1986’s *Double Take*, a nude Don Johnson frolics by a waterfall with Melanie Griffith in an outtake captured for a story that had run a decade earlier—a johnson-free Johnson pictorial.

...

To get a sense of why certain decisions regarding nude male photography were made in the past, I spoke with Gary Cole, *PLAYBOY*’s longtime photography director, who held the role from 1975 until 2009. He quickly clarified the penis-shy editorial perspective.

“The subhead under the magazine’s cover logo read ‘Entertainment for Men,’” Cole says. And though the magazine had a generally welcoming attitude regarding all sexual orientations, it’s obvious the subhead in question could more accurately have read “Entertainment for Heterosexual Men.” Unsurprisingly for the world’s preeminent men’s magazine, the editors operated “on the assumption that our readers were not particularly interested” in photos of naked men.

“Male nudity was not a subject we dwelled on,” Cole adds, “though it was occasionally included in the magazine, especially in features such as *Sex in Cinema* and *The Year in Sex*.”

And he’s absolutely right. Flipping through these annual

assemblages of film stills and nip slips, I saw a number of stars and leading men naked or close to it: David Bowie, Peter Fonda, Dennis Rodman and Antonio Banderas, to name just a handful, who all appeared alongside plenty of color photography of women celebs and actresses.

From time to time male skin was also deployed to great comic effect in *PLAYBOY*. (See, for example, Steve Martin on the January 1980 cover, wearing only a white tux jacket and what might best be described as a diaper, which I guess is sexy to someone, somewhere.) Perhaps the most stellar example I found of nudity in service of hilarity is *The Vatican Sex Manual*. Appearing in the November 1976 issue, the pictorial is actually excerpted from comedian Eric Idle’s *Rutland Dirty Weekend Book*, in which the Monty Python star and a female model, both in various states of undress, demonstrate for the camera several amusingly asexual sex positions such as “The Fred Astaire” (butt to butt) and “The Missionary Position” (praying while kneeling on opposite sides of a bed).

“I always loved this gag,” Idle tells me via e-mail, “a how not-to-have sex manual.” He recalls feeling no awkwardness during the photo shoot. “I was fairly accustomed to being nude, as almost everyone swam naked in Provence in the summer in those days. It didn’t bother me.” (Interesting side note: Idle’s wife, Tania Kosevich, is the jeans-shortened September 1974 *PLAYBOY* cover model.)

It’s easy to imagine that if the editors had been as comfortable with the naked male body as Idle was, we might have seen more of it, for the potential benefit of all readers—regardless of sexual orientation or gender identification.

Maybe that time has finally come. The world has seen increased recognition and acceptance of sexual fluidity, and as a culture we’re realizing that, yes, sexuality truly is rich and varied. Readers, like the population as a whole, come from across the sexual spectrum, so surely there’s a market. Male nudity can be a beautiful thing to so many people—here’s to entertainment for *all*. ■



A GALA FOR THE AGES: ANSWER KEY



From page 219: 1. Mr. Playboy (suave avatar of Playboy founder Hugh Hefner); 2. Barbi Benton (pictorial mainstay and *Playboy After Dark* entertainer who became Hefner's longtime partner and discovered the Los Angeles property that became Playboy Mansion West); 3. Ian Fleming (author and *Playboy Interview* subject whose James Bond character made several appearances in the magazine); 4. Janet Pilgrim (PLAYBOY staffer who became a three-time Playmate); 5. Dick Gregory (trailblazing Playboy Club comic); 6. Shel Silverstein (longtime traveling cartoonist and correspondent); 7. Alex Haley (author of the first *Playboy Interview* and the magazine's most famous interviewer); 8. Christie Hefner (CEO of Playboy Enterprises for 20 years); 9. Alice K. Turner (influential longtime PLAYBOY fiction editor); 10. LeRoy Neiman (Femlin creator and PLAYBOY artist in residence); 11. Marilyn Monroe (cover model for the first issue and the magazine's only "Sweetheart of the Month"); 12. Lenny Bruce (comic whose *How to Talk Dirty and Influence People* PLAYBOY serialized in 1963 and 1964); 13. Ray Bradbury (frequent sci-fi contributor whose *Fahrenheit 451* was serialized in 1954); 14. Miles Davis (performer at the first Playboy Jazz Fest and subject of the first *Playboy Interview*); 15. Alberto Vargas (pinup artist whose full-page illustrations were an early magazine staple); 16. Pamela Anderson (February 1990 Playmate and most frequent U.S. PLAYBOY cover model).



Rebekka Armstrong

OUR SEPTEMBER 1986 PLAYMATE
REFLECTS ON LOVING
LIFE AND LIVING WITH AIDS



IF YOU HAD TOLD ME WHEN I WAS YOUNGER that I would one day say out loud that I have HIV, and that I would be okay and it would feel *good* to stop hiding it, I wouldn't have believed you. But when I did speak up, a huge weight was lifted. It was the best thing I ever could have done for myself.

I was 22 and already a Playmate when I was diagnosed with HIV. When the clinic called to tell me, I remember crumpling to the floor. The energy just left my body; I was in complete shock. At the time, it was a death sentence. The doctors said I might have a year or two. For a while I was diligent about trying to be as healthy as possible, taking my medications. But the medicine itself had awful side effects. I developed severe anemia, neuropathy and pancreatitis. You start thinking, If I'm going to die soon, is this really how I want to live, not *doing* anything? To hell with it. I just want to have a good time—eat chili cheese fries, drink beer, snort crystal meth, smoke pot. Those were my coping mechanisms.

Eventually I hit bottom and tried to take my own life. I landed in the hospital for days, and during that time I got sober and started to talk about my feelings. I'd been hiding the truth from almost everyone for about five years. It was when I was in the hospital that I decided I wanted to go public about my diagnosis. Before that, I wanted to tell Playboy about my HIV status and everything else. I went in and just opened up: "I've been terrified to tell you about what's really going on with me," I said.

Then I did *Hard Copy*. I had no idea what to expect. They could've portrayed me negatively, but they didn't. Years later, after I was diagnosed with AIDS, Playboy helped me do *E! True Hollywood Story*, and Hef did an interview for the show. He didn't have to do that; he was so cool. It was empowering to know that he and Playboy had my back and supported me. I wasn't doing this alone.

One night, I ran into Christie Hefner at the Mansion. I was hoping she would give me a chance to talk to Playmates or Playboy employees about AIDS, because I had started lecturing and teaching about it locally. Christie took it further: She gave me a platform. Playboy funded an initiative often called the Sex on Campus tour, and for years I traveled the country, talking to students, lecturing

and raising awareness. Having a platform to talk about HIV gave me a purpose. It gave me a voice.

Students would fill the room, thinking I was there to talk about sex. They didn't know it was going to be about HIV. When I dropped the bomb on them, the reaction was always fear: "That could've been me." I would stay for hours afterward. I wanted to talk to as many young people as possible about the realities of this disease and how easy it is *not* to contract it. I lived to educate people about HIV and AIDS. It was a career.

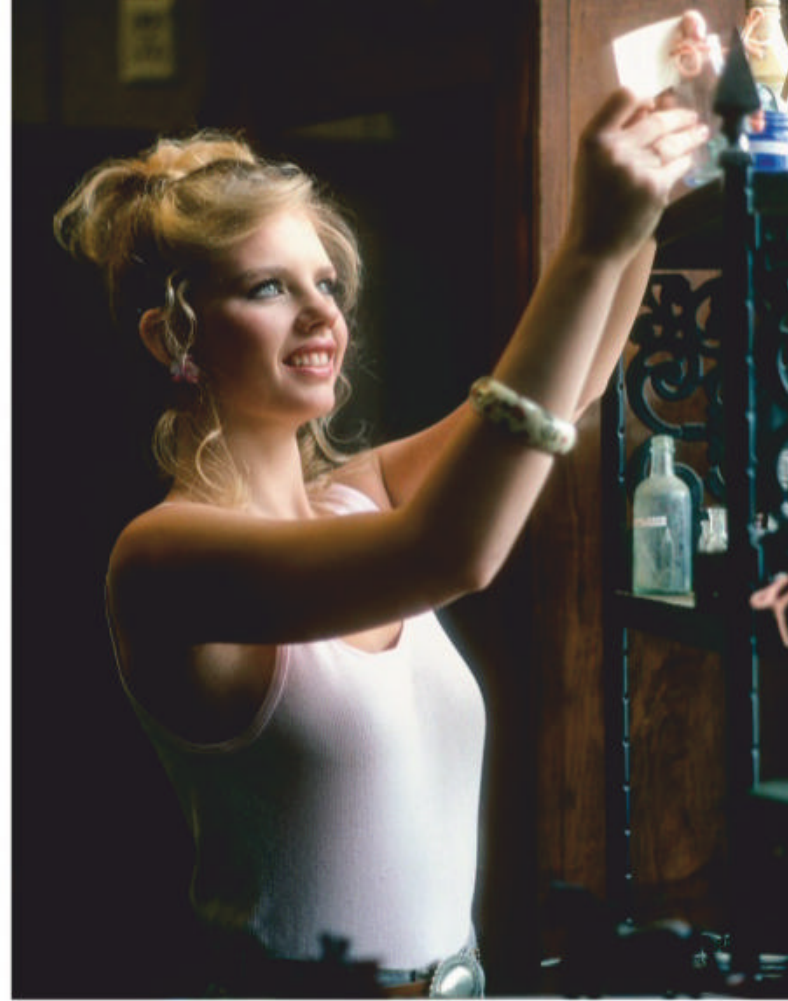
I still do outreach. I speak at many venues, lecture at schools and participate in focus groups. You might even see photos of me on billboards and at bus stops around the country in ads to support HIV awareness. I'm an activist. There's a part of me that *needs* to help others. Being a Playmate had its perks—we were on the guest list at all the L.A. clubs, parties and restaurants, and I was in rock videos like Great White's "Once Bitten Twice Shy." But more important, people listened to me because I was a Playmate; it was like I was flying in on Playboy's magic carpet. I would do it all over again in a heartbeat.

When your body starts wasting from AIDS, weight just melts off. It eats muscle mass; it's catabolic. I needed to keep myself strong and fit, so for about 10 years I was really into body-building. The last competition I did was in 2009, and then I took what I had learned about fitness and turned that into a new career. Today I'm a personal trainer, a certified corrective exercise specialist and a sports therapy aide. I wear many hats. I love gardening in my yard; I'm a hot-pepper freak. Last year I grew cannabis. I don't indulge—I have no desire now to drink or use drugs—but I turned it into cannacoconut oil and developed my own CBD balm, Buddha Trees. I got really into it.

It's cliché, but today I love life. When I was diagnosed, I thought my life was over. I didn't see a future for myself. Just making plans for that year felt really brave. But here I am, 30 years later. In about 30 more I'll be 80 and in my rocking chair. Not all days are perfect by any means, but I'm so much more than happy. I am inspired on a daily basis. I'm going to be a grandmother this summer! My future is filled with love.

Preceding pages: "We spent about three days out in the desert for my Playmate photo shoot. It was during the bloom in Palmdale." **Near right:** "I think we shot this in a rustic-looking old cabin near an abandoned gold mine." **Far right, top and middle:** Outtakes from Armstrong's Playmate pictorial. "Subscribers used to be able to get recorded wake-up calls from Playmates. I'd say something like 'Okay, I'm giving you butterfly kisses all down your belly, and it's time to get up.'" **Bottom:** "This was taken outside the general store in a tiny town called Randsburg, not far from where I grew up."





Opposite page: “I grew up in the Mojave Desert. There wasn’t a whole lot to do, but I knew I wanted to be in PLAYBOY. The day I turned 18, I asked a family friend to help me submit my photos, and I got called in for a test shoot. This photo is from that shoot—the shoes and panties are mine, but they put those socks on me.” **Right:** “When Marilyn Grabowski, PLAYBOY’s photo editor, told me they were going to make me a Playmate, I couldn’t believe it. I didn’t tell anyone except my high school sweetheart, and I swore him to secrecy because I thought I was going to jinx it.” **Bottom left:** “This is another shot from my Playmate test.” **Bottom right:** Another outtake from Armstrong’s pictorial photo shoot.

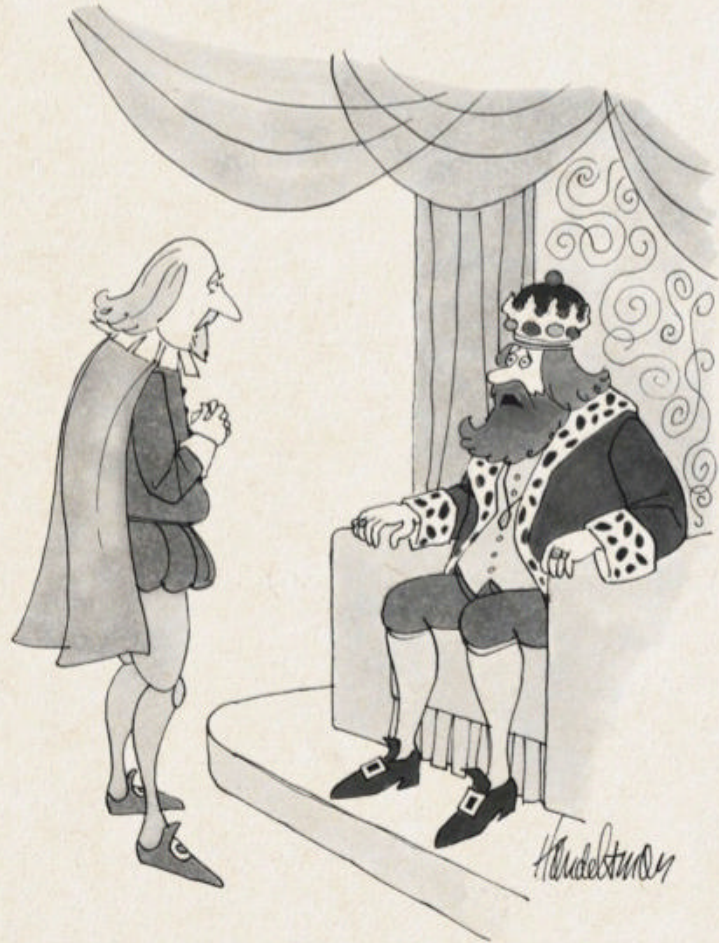




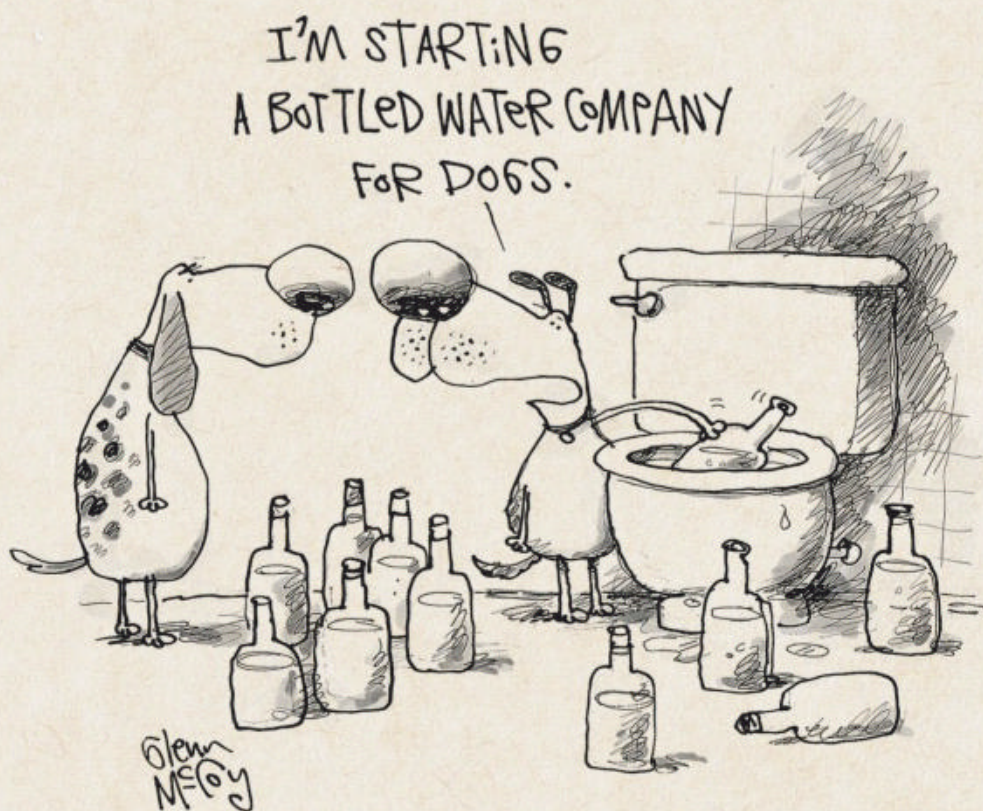
CLASSIC



"It looks like Isosceles is experimenting with triangles again."



"I'm really upset that the people don't believe me anymore. Perhaps I should use a different facial expression when I lie to them."



"Great Scott, Holmes—you are a master of disguise!"

CARTOONS



"Damn it! Somebody's at the air lock!"



"I'd like to disassociate myself from the remarks of my companions, Miss."



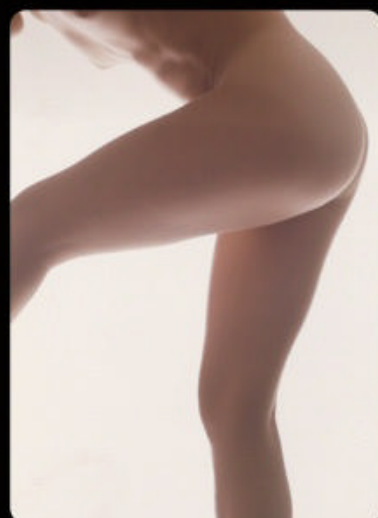
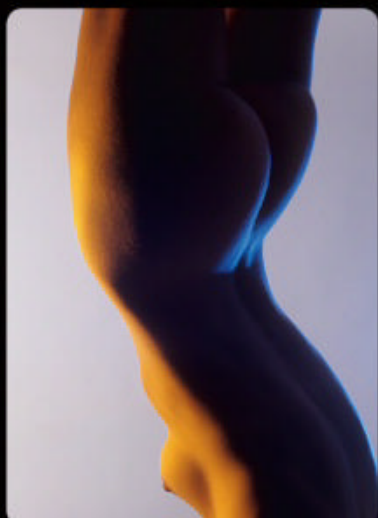
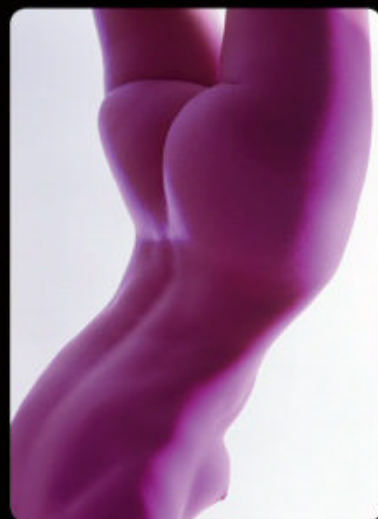
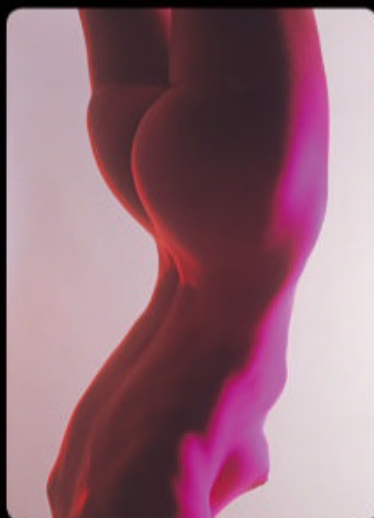
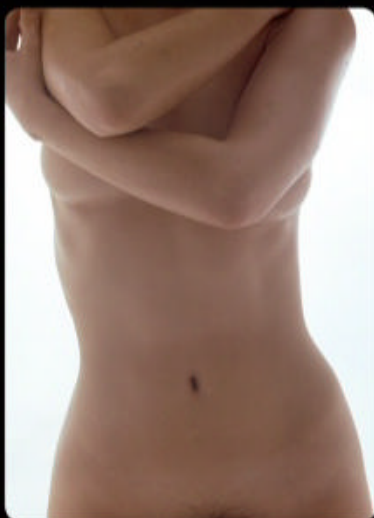
"Our task, ladies and gentlemen, is to convince the American male that driving a small car is no reflection on the size of his genitalia."





CHICAGO, 1966

Bunnies Arlee Bird, Gail Maranda and Margaret Vachy wish America a happy birthday in this outtake from a photo shoot for *VIP*, the Playboy Club magazine.





TARANA BURKE **MAYOR PETE**
ESTHER PEREL MAREN MORRIS
AVAN JOGIA **CARLOTA GUERRERO**
ED FREEMAN TYLER BLACKBURN
SOPHIE O'NEIL **GEENA ROCERO**
TEELA LAROUX LISA TADDEO **WISSA**
MATT MCGORRY **FAVIANNA RODRIGUEZ**
DREAM HAMPTON CHIDERA EGGERUE
HELEN BEARD **JOYCE CAROL OATES**
DUSTY RAY BOTTOMS GRAHAM DUNN
SASHEER ZAMATA **DARNELL MOORE**
FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA